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## **Abstract**

### **DEVELOPING STRUCTURES FOR HEALTH AND GROWTH FOR NORTHGATE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN BATAVIA, NEW YORK**

**by Mitchell C. Pierce**

A developing theme within church growth literature is the importance of church structures to church health and growth. The purpose of this dissertation was to determine whether similarities exist among the organizational structure and the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York.

This study is a single, descriptive case study. Data was gathered from the past twenty-five-year history, 1971 - 1996, of Northgate Free Methodist Church. Twenty-four past and present leaders were given the Natural Church Development Survey. The twenty-four questionnaires were divided into three groups of eight each, according to leadership in the seventies, eighties and nineties. A "quality index" score was diagnosed for each decade. Comparisons of the growth rate and the quality index for each decade did not demonstrate similarities among church structures and the growth of the church.

Eight factors are identified as essential to the structure of a healthy, growing church. These eight essential elements are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships.

## DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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**FOR NORTHGATE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN BATAVIA, NEW YORK**

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**DEVELOPING STRUCTURES FOR HEALTH AND GROWTH  
FOR NORTHGATE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN BATAVIA, NEW YORK**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented to**

**the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Doctor of Ministry**

**By**

**Mitchell C. Pierce**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Understanding the Problem**

Within the Christian church, organizational structures and systems play a vital role. Many churches advance or plateau based upon the type of structure around which they organize. Rick Warren, noted author and pastor of Saddleback Church in California, contends that structures are a key to the health and growth of a church (1995). Warren's thoughts are affirmed by the comments of pastors giving credit to the structure for either controlling or enhancing growth.

When I moved to Northgate Free Methodist Church in Batavia, New York in 1991, I inherited a complex church structure. We had an average worship attendance of 224 with a membership of 221, and a ministry ballot with 122 positions. Northgate was on a growth plateau in worship attendance but the number of boards and committees was growing. I joked, "The church structure has enough committees and boards to run the entire city." A mindset had evolved with the church structure that ministry equaled a position on a board or committee, and committees slipped into a posture of permission granting or denying. These were good people, but they had an unwieldy structure.

I was convinced that structure can be either a barrier to health and growth or it can be an instrument to promote better health and growth. Our church needed to take a good look at its present structure and evaluate whether it was appropriate for our times, size, complexity of program, and vision. Guiding

principles that shape the structures of healthy, viable churches needed to be identified and adopted. A strategic plan needed to be designed and implemented.

### **Context of the Study**

I am currently serving as the senior pastor of the Northgate Free Methodist Church in Batavia, New York. The church staff consists of a full-time associate for Discipleship, who is responsible for educational ministries, small groups, recreation, and the praise band. As the senior pastor, I am responsible for worship, outreach, administration, finance, and personnel.

Northgate is a program-based church, with activities occurring seven days a week. The average morning worship attendance is now 251, with two morning worship services being offered. The church enjoys a good image in the community and is known as a family church because of its strong children and youth ministries.

The name "Northgate" was assumed in the mid-sixties, when the church relocated and built its present facilities at 350 Bank Street, on the northeastern edge of the city. Shortly after completing the building program, the Rev. Evan Hessler was appointed pastor. Pastor Hessler was well-loved for his shepherding ministry. Under his leadership the church added an educational wing in 1977. Pastor Hessler died of a heart attack in 1979, after serving Northgate for eleven years.



The Rev. Laverne Bates was appointed to Northgate in 1979. Under his leadership the church nearly doubled in worship attendance and went through another building program, adding on a fellowship center/gymnasium and office wing complex. Pastor Bates also pursued a strong shepherding ministry and an extensive counseling ministry. A good administrator, he led the church through a major reorganization of its governing and committee structure. Pastor Bates served Northgate Church for twelve years, leaving in 1991 to become a conference superintendent.

When I came to Northgate in 1991, I inherited the building debt and an extensive committee structure. The debt load was manageable, but the number of committees and the people needed to staff these committees overwhelmed me.

The city of Batavia lies halfway between Buffalo and Rochester--thirty-four miles from Rochester and thirty-six miles from Buffalo. Although it is a city of approximately 20,000 people, Batavia offers a small town atmosphere and is aptly described as "a big neighborhood". Serving as the county seat, Batavia has an expanded population of 92,000 people. With a healthy balance of industry and agriculture and a good school system, including a community college, a rural/suburban atmosphere prevails. The economy is stable because of Batavia's proximity to the big cities and the reasonable commute to jobs in either direction. Many professional people make Batavia their home because of

the combination of small-town values and big-city proximity. Commuters are also drawn by the opportunity to buy a larger house than they could afford in either nearby metropolitan area.

In a county with ninety-six churches, Northgate Free Methodist Church has enjoyed steady growth and a wide-range of attractive programs and ministries. Over the past twenty-five years, Northgate has grown from 127 to 251 in morning worship average attendance and from 100 to 226 in membership. This represents about a 100 percent increase in worship attendance and 126 percent in membership.

Currently, the adult membership is comprised of 62 percent Free Methodist background, 15 percent mainline denomination, 13 percent Roman Catholic, and 10 percent other evangelical churches. The average age of the congregation is the upper thirties. A wide diversity of vocations exists within the congregation, but we are largely a white-collar church.

Northgate Church is blessed with many professional people who have committed themselves to the life and ministry of the church, resulting in good lay leadership. A strong base of financial support allows the church to enjoy the benefits of fine facilities, a multiple staff, and multifaceted programs. This year's budget is \$200,000. The last building program, in 1988, was a \$750,000 project.

As a part of the Free Methodist denomination, Northgate Church adheres to the Book of Discipline for matters of faith and practice. We are an

evangelical, holiness church, in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition. We emphasize a personal, faith relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and a lifestyle of holy living. We believe in a second work of the Holy Spirit, called entire sanctification, by which the believer receives power from the Holy Spirit to live in love and to serve with fruitfulness. The Bible is viewed as the authoritative Word of God and as our guidebook for life.

The church is governed by a twelve-member board, called the pastor's cabinet. All twelve members serve by virtue of an elected office--secretary, treasurer, delegates, and commission chairs. Little turnover occurs in the makeup of the board, as the same people often get reelected year after year.

In my previous ministry appointment, at Pearce Memorial Church in Rochester, New York, the church had undergone a professional consultation with Carl George, which resulted in restructuring the ministry under a meta-church structure. I saw firsthand the value of an organizational structure that helped the people of God to accomplish their God-given mission through an appropriate deployment of people, resources, and ministry processes.

The task before me now was to bring those resources to bear upon my present ministry placement and to help the people to realize that the current structure of our church was not the one needed to achieve our purpose or vision. An unwieldy committee structure, coupled with a dangerous mindset about ministry being a position or an office, was motivation enough to change the

structure. When the prospect of building a structure that could set the congregation free to do real ministry gets added in, the motivation becomes even stronger.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether similarities exist among church structure and the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York.

The impulse to restructure the system of governance should be a response to essential change and growth in the life and ministry of the church. Dann Spader, director of SonLife Ministries and Growing a Healthy Church seminars, says any time a church grows by 45 percent it necessitates restructuring. Lyle Schaller (1992c) says that as a church grows "structure becomes more prominent" (118).

The primary goal of restructuring the governance system of the church is to have the church become purpose-driven and to empower and involve qualified lay persons in ministry. George Barna says, "the ministry is not called to fit the church's structure; the structure exists to further effective ministry" (137). A church properly structured can put hundreds of people into ministry without creating a bottleneck within the decision-making processes of the church.

The focus of this study is to look at what has been done to restructure the church system of governance and program of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past three decades. How has the church been structured? What has been effective in enlisting, equipping, and empowering the people to see every member in ministry? What has hindered growth and health?

### **Research Questions**

This study addresses three fundamental questions:

1. What similarities exist among observed church growth and the organizational structure of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past three decades, 1971 to 1996?
2. What positive impact did a paradigm shift in structures of power (from authoritarian to purpose-driven) have on church health and growth?
3. What limitations were observed in the ministry paradigms that impacted church health and growth?

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, the principal terms are defined as follows:

*Growth* is the increase of the average number of persons attending the principal worship services each year.

*Health* is defined negatively as the lack of sickness or disease and positively as the balance or "harmonious interplay" of the following eight quality characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate

spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships (Schwarz).

*Systems* are organizational patterns that congregations follow to keep in balance their purpose, structures, relationships, and spirituality.

*Structure* is "the skeletal system that the congregation constructs in order to hold the various parts of the system together" (Shawchuck and Heuser 1993a 213).

*Purpose-driven* means that the church has defined its purposes and then figured out a process or system for fulfilling those purposes (Warren 109).

*Authoritarian* refers to a leadership approach of maintaining control by enforcing the rules and handing down decisions from the top (Lindgren 1977c 23).

## **Methodology**

The methodology will be a single, descriptive case study, studying the life and ministry of Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York, over the past twenty-five years, 1971 - 1996. Particular attention will be given to its organizational structures and to its decadal growth patterns. This information will be gathered from church records, noting especially a 1978 self study, a 1988 church growth consultation report, and pastoral and attendance records.

## Data Sources and Data Collection

The collection of data for this study is limited to the past twenty-five-year history, 1971 - 1996, of Northgate Free Methodist Church. These years represent a changing paradigm in structure of power from authoritarian to a purpose-driven model. These years also represent the greatest decadal growth of Northgate's history.

Data was gathered from two primary sources: (1) archival records, and (2) A survey of past and present key lay leaders. The principle sources from archival records are the official minutes of the board and society meetings, a 1978 self study report, and a 1988 church growth consultation report. Data concerning the pastoral records and attendance records of the congregation is taken from the *Yearbook of The Free Methodist Church*. These records are published annually and are part of the church library.

Data concerning the health and structures of the past twenty-five years of Northgate Free Methodist Church was collected by the use of the *Natural Church Development Survey*, given to twenty-four past and current key lay leaders. Four long-term members, selected on the basis of their active participation in the life and ministry of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past twenty to thirty years received a letter (see Appendix, Figure 2) which requested that each member fill out the three-column inventory, giving the

names of eight key lay leaders from the seventies, eighties, and nineties. I identified the twenty-four key lay leaders from these inventories.

A letter explaining the nature of this project was mailed to each of the twenty-four selected key lay leaders along with a copy of the *Natural Church Development Survey* (see Appendix, Figures 3 and 1). The letter requested that each leader fill out and return the inventory by October 20. When the surveys were returned, they were sent to *ChurchSmart Resources* for computer tabulation.

The key lay leaders were divided into three groups, according to their terms of leadership in the seventies, eighties, or nineties; eight leaders for each decade. The "health quotient" score of each group will be compared with the growth charts of their decade to determine if a relationship exists between the structure and the growth of the church.

## **Instrumentation and Variables**

Instrumentation. The *Natural Church Development Survey* was given to both past and current key lay leaders. The survey was first developed by the *Institute for Church Development* located in Germany and was later translated and revised by *ChurchSmart Resources*. This instrument is a paper-and-pencil inventory that asks the leader to grade the health of the church on the basis of eight quality characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic



small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships. The results are tabulated through a computer program and a complete report, a "church profile", including suggestions on how to raise your health levels, is mailed back to the church from *ChurchSmart*.

This instrument was used in the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the causes of church growth: More than one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on all five continents took part in this project. Christoph Schalk, a social scientist and psychologist, designed the questionnaire with rigorous standards for objectivity, reliability, and validity (Natural Church Development, 1996). This instrument is being used in this study to determine the perceived degree of health and its impact upon the growth of the congregation.

Variables. The dependent variable of this study, the growth of the church, is defined as an increase in the average worship attendance. The independent variable is the structure of governance. Structure is measured by the quality of these eight characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. In this study, it was assumed the rate of worship attendance growth was influenced by the congregational structure.

## **Delimitations and Generalizability**

**Delimitations.** This study focused on Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York, and was limited to its twenty-five-year history from 1971 to 1996. It was also limited to twenty-four key lay leaders. These key leaders were selected by four long-term members on the basis of their perception that the twenty-four leaders were the core persons most involved in the center of the church's life for the time period designated. The study is limited by the perception of the four as to who is a leader, and the perception of the twenty-four as to the quality of health of the church.

**Generalizability.** The findings of this study have direct implications for Northgate Free Methodist Church. Generalizations about other congregations, within the Free Methodist denomination or of similar size and makeup, can only be made with great caution. I assume many similarities exist between other churches transitioning from traditional to purpose-driven structures.

## **Biblical Foundation**

The theological nature of congregational structures is supported by Scripture. Although the Bible does not define a specific structure or system for church organization, examples abound of good administration and organizational principles in both the Old and New Testaments. Moses organized the leaders of Israel, Joseph administered the affairs of Egypt, Jesus trained the

twelve to do the work of ministry, the Apostle Paul established congregations everywhere he traveled.

One of the primary biblical images used in the New Testament is the body. The Apostle Paul uses the human body as a model of church organization. In I Corinthians 12 he talks about how body parts must work together in order for the whole body to be healthy and functional. Just as the body is a living organism and is made up of many systems, so is the church.

Another biblical image the Apostle Paul uses is a helmsman. Paul identifies administration as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 he uses the word *kuberneseis* for administration. This word is translated as leading, governing, ruling, organizing, administering. The same Greek word is used for *helmsman*. The picture of administration is that of a pilot steering a ship. The pilot does not work alone to steer the ship but directs the crew to accomplish the task of moving from port to port. Good church administration facilitates the work of every gifted member to accomplish the mission.

Another biblical concept that relates to structures and the need for them to change is the concept of "wineskins". In Luke 5:36 - 39 Jesus speaks in a parable about new cloth and new wine not adapting to old cloth and old wineskins. Howard Snyder says,

There is that which is new and potent and essential—the gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is that which is secondary, subsidiary, man-made.

These are the wineskins, and include traditions, structures and patterns of doing things which have grown up around the gospel. (13)

Snyder goes on to say that church structures necessarily need to be changed and updated. Church structures are relative and they need to be changed repeatedly and periodically.

If pastors are to lead their congregations to vital, healthy spiritual life, they must be aware of the need for change in church systems and structures. Failure to understand and direct church systems and structures can hinder the health and growth of a church.

### **Overview of Study**

Four chapters follow this chapter.

In Chapter 2, the principal organizational literature and research are reviewed. The chapter highlights systems theory, examining both secular and Christian literature. A section describing issues of health and a section dealing with church systems is also included.

In Chapter 3, the problem and the purpose of this study are restated in summary form. Explanation is given for the design of this project, how the research was conducted, and methodology of data analysis.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented.

In Chapter 5, the major findings and interpretations are summarized.

## CHAPTER 2

### Precedents in the Literature

Administrative structures and systems are most important features of an organization that help to determine its health and development or lack thereof. If congruence occurs between an organization's purpose and structure, there can be impressive results. Conversely, an inappropriate structure will thwart the fulfillment of an organization.

Within the Church of Jesus Christ, administrative structures play a vital role. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, one of the largest and fastest growing churches in America, contends that

While the kind of structure a church has does not *cause* growth, it does control the *rate* of growth. And every church must eventually decide whether it is going to be structured for *control* or structured for *growth*.(378)

If Warren's contention is true, then churches as organizations need to pay careful attention to the development of appropriate structures and systems around which they organize their ministries and programs.

This chapter endeavors to give an overview of modern organizational development research and thought, highlighting some of the most informative studies. These studies focus upon systems theory. After examining the secular literature, the chapter then reviews what Christian authors say about organizational structure by looking at the Bible and structure, and church growth and structure.

## **Systems Theory**

Five major models of organizational theory are commonly recognized: traditional, charismatic, classical, human relations, and systems. Each of these theories delves into issues of leadership, structures, relationships, purpose, decision-making, conflict resolution, communication and goals. Of these five, systems theory seems to offer a more desirable model for ministry since it best correlates with the nature and purpose of the church, and is a synthesis of the others.

Systems theory has become a popular means of looking at the church (Lindgren and Shawchuck, 1977; Luecke and Southard, 1986; Armour and Browning, 1995). Some of its strengths are that it concerns itself with both organizational goals and the goals of persons; it addresses organizational effectiveness in the midst of rapidly changing environmental conditions; and it is concerned with the purpose or mission of an organization.

Peter Drucker (1974) identifies three tasks which management has to perform to enable the institution to function. The first task is clarifying the specific purpose and mission of the institution. The next is making work productive, and the worker achieving. The final task is managing social impacts and social responsibilities (40).

A pastor, as leader, assumes these three tasks by keeping the church purpose-driven, creating an atmosphere where persons relating and working together can accomplish the church's mission, and holds persons accountable to

act responsibly as Christ's representatives in all their relationships. This system's view of management and workers underscores the importance of relationship between leadership and followership.

Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985) say that a leader may be a genius at seeing the big picture and articulating new views of the future, but it only works when the organization assumes ownership of the vision. A leader must cast the vision and clarify the mission, but energized workers make it a reality. Both leader and worker must assume vital roles to accomplish the mission.

Ministry today is more and more complex. "We are going through a period of human history when change and complexity seem to feed on one another" (Armour and Browning, 1995, preface). Armour and Browning contend that multi-system management is needed in the organizational life of the church. They identify eight systems of dominant thinking (see chapters 3 and 11 of Armour and Browning), moving from simpler to more ambiguous and diverse ways of looking at the world and the realities of life. Each of these eight systems can be found within the church, with the dominant system providing guidance to our outlook, priorities, and behavior.

In the face of these diverse systems, the leadership of the church needs to deal with constant confusion, conflict, complexity, and change. Armour and Browning write:

In essence, we must tailor-make every structural element in a multi-system church. Doing so requires immense leadership energy, far beyond what traditional church organization demands. Not only that, multi-system management puts a premium on planning carefully,

gathering feedback continuously, and making frequent midcourse corrections. You cannot put a multi-system church on autopilot and expect it to fly straight and level very long. (205)

Armour and Browning suggest that there are four essentials in multi-system church management. The first is developing a congregation-wide atmosphere of forbearance. Second is maintaining feedback loops in decision-making; third, practicing systems-sensitivity without using systems terminology; fourth, becoming diligent in vision-casting (206).

Peter Senge (1994) writes about building "learning organizations." Senge claims that organizations cannot "fix things" permanently. By applying theories, methods, and new ideas, an organization can redesign its infrastructure. A new type of organization can then evolve through this learning and experimenting process. The members become open to, even focused upon, enhancing and expanding their capabilities. In other words, you create an organization that can learn.

Senge identifies five disciplines that are core to a learning organization:

1. Personal Mastery--learning to expand our personal capacity to create the results we most desire . . .
2. Mental Models--reflecting upon, continually clarifying, and improving our internal pictures of the world, and seeing how they shape our actions and decisions.
3. Shared Vision-- . . . developing shared images of the future we seek to create, and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there.
4. Team Learning--transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual member's talents.
5. Systems Thinking-- a way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of systems . . . (6-7).



From a systems theory perspective, a balance of quality leadership and lay ministry are of vital importance in the church. Pastor and people must work together as a interdependent team to accomplish the Great Commission.

Systems theory leads us to ask: "What ministry needs to happen to fulfill the purpose of the church? How many of our people are really ministering? How am I functioning as a visionary, equipping leader? What are the fundamental steps to be taken to achieve health and vitality? What processes and systems are in place to meet needs and to accomplish the vision?" Robert Slocum (1990) says, "high technologists really have discovered more efficient and humanizing ways of managing, organizing, and producing. We are foolish to follow God's agenda by anything less than the most effective methods" (69).

### **Family Systems Theory**

Family therapy has taken a systemic approach for improving family relationships. To understand individuals, understanding how persons function in their family contexts is important. Instead of viewing individual parts and concentrating on isolated issues, one must view and consider the interrelatedness of things as a whole (Shawchuck and Heuser 1996b 277).

Family systems theory can be applied to social organizations other than the nuclear family. Churches, for example, can gain greater understanding of relational dynamics and approaches for developing helping systems through family systems principles.

Edwin Friedman, both a rabbi and a therapist, applied the family model in his classic work, Generation To Generation (1985). Friedman saw that the emotional process at work in individual families was also present in the congregation. He began to integrate systemic principles in his ministry, resulting in improved functioning in both families and congregation.

Family systems theory focuses on the interrelatedness of things as a whole. If one thing is changed in a system, the rest of the system is also affected. Any given set of circumstances is comprised of many contributing factors. Each person in a system brings to the group their own life experiences. In addition, unconscious patterns of behavior can be brought to play.

The emotional patterns of relational systems are complex. Several key concepts from family systems theory help to understand these patterns, and to intervene in times of conflict and tension. These include homeostasis, boundaries, triangling, emotions, symptom bearer, and anxiety.

Family systems theory is a helpful way to understand church organizational systems. Much can be learned by looking through this lens at the processes, structures, and systems of congregational life and ministry.

James Hopewell (1987) establishes a view of congregational structures using a narrative description. Hopewell says each local church has its own story. "Word, gesture, and artifact form a local language" (5).

Hopewell sees four approaches to examining churches: contextual, mechanical, organic, and symbolic. He views them as textures, mechanisms,

organisms, and idioms. "While all four perspectives are in play in any single instance of inquiry, one of the four generally dominates" (19).

Stories and their mythic structures are the primary means employed in a *symbolic* approach to understanding the congregation . . . . *Contextual* portrayals of a local church concentrate upon demographic features("urban, middle class, white, elderly membership"); *mechanist* definitions frequently provide numerical and functional facts("250 members, with a \$100,000 annual budget and a darn good Sunday School"); *organicist* interpretations feature interpersonal and emotional attributes("a big, usually happy family that enjoys its occasional fights"). (50)

A contextual study focuses upon the social environment and the larger secular context of the congregation. The concern is not so much with the internal operations, processes, and structures of the congregation as it is with its relation to its environment. Demographic trends, neighborhood culture, and community climate are critical issues, defining the environment.

A mechanistic examination moves beyond the surroundings to the internal operations of a church. The church growth movement takes a mechanistic approach to understanding the life and health of a congregation. Quantitative measurements and program evaluation are techniques utilized to assess the accomplishments of a local church. Structural stability, the efficiency of its systems, and the capacity to embrace change are ways of evaluating how well the church mechanically operates, how well it does its job.

An organic perspective is not as concerned with environment or process as it is with community. A church is viewed as an organism that best performs its ministry by the collaboration of all its parts. The issues are relationships,

cohesion, sensitivity, harmony, and maturity. Conflict resolution, organization development, and all-member participation are features of an organic approach.

A symbolic approach focuses on the identity and personality of a congregation. A church not only impacts its environment, performs tasks, and develops community, but it also conveys meaning. Common vision and shared values give a congregation its identity. This self-identity determines the way the congregation engages the world.

Hopewell concludes,

So unexpectedly complex is the congregation that it requires comprehension from four quite different perspectives. It cannot be correctly understood without an exploration of the textural qualities that tie it to its larger context. Nor does its function become clear without analysis of the mechanist qualities that trace its dynamics and performance. Nor does this household of God come to life without organicist attention to its growth in community. And the observation of a congregation's symbolic interaction discloses its identity and web of meanings. (31-32)

Indeed congregations are complex and any attempt to understand congregational systems and structures is a formidable challenge. This study takes more of a mechanistic approach to understanding the issues of growth and health, structural stability, and efficiency of the systems of Northgate Free Methodist Church. It is my hope that this study will lead to the development of a structure that will involve and equip persons in purpose-driven ministry.

## **The Bible and Structure**

How do modern organizational theories relate to Christian churches? The foundation for a Christian perspective is the Bible. Although the Bible does not define a specific structure or system for church organization, examples abound of good administration and organizational principles in both the Old and New Testaments.

One can read in Genesis 41 about the administrative responsibilities of Joseph and his good leadership through a most difficult period of history for both his people, the Israelites, and the Egyptians. In God's providence, Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt during a time of severe famine, and God used Joseph's administrative abilities to harvest, store, and distribute food for the good of many people.

In Exodus 18 the classical account of "the Jethro Principle" reveals Moses overworked and on the verge of burnout. His father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate responsibility and to share the workload with others. Jethro suggested organizing the tribes by tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. With this organizational change, Moses decentralized the responsibility and authority, and created a span of control and care on a one-to-ten ratio.

The book of Nehemiah is a case study in leadership. Nehemiah was a leader so compelled by a vision that he was able to lead the people of God to trust Him to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. From hearing God's voice, to

assessing the needs, to challenging God's people, to implementing plans, Nehemiah organized and lead the people to accomplish the vision.

Jesus called and trained twelve disciples for ministry. He spent three years modeling, teaching, training, and involving them in ministry. Robert Coleman in his classic book, The Master Plan of Evangelism (1963), identifies eight guiding principles for leadership development based on Jesus' model: selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction.

In Acts 6 disciples organized the workload and delegated the responsibilities of ministry. The church was growing and demanding more so the disciples established their priorities, clarified their roles, and created a system to let expansion continue. They identified other leaders, empowered them, and shared the ministry with them.

The Apostle Paul uses the human body as his model of church organization. In I Corinthians 12 he talks about how body parts must work together in order for the whole body to be healthy and functional. The ears, eyes, hands, feet, and other organs must fulfill their functions. So it is in the church. Each person needs to fulfill his or her role in the organizational life of the church so the church can accomplish what God intended.

The New Testament word that the Apostle Paul uses for administration in I Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 is *kuberneseis*. This word is translated as leading, governing, ruling, organizing, administering, the same Greek word for

*helmsman*. The picture of administration is that of a pilot steering a ship. The helmsman directs the crew and makes sure that each worker does his part to move the ship on its course. The helmsman does not do all the work alone but is responsible for giving direction to the crew to move the ship from one place to another.

An examination of the Bible produces much evidence that organization, structures, and systems are important in the life and ministry of God's people. Although no specifically defined structure for the church surfaces in the Scriptures, administration is vital to the health and growth of the church.

### **Church Growth and Structure**

Influences of the industrial and business world shape the literature on organizational structures and systems from a Christian perspective. Lindgren and Shawchuck (1977) examined church administration by looking at the influence of organization theory on the practice of ministry. They introduced some components of five organizational theories and demonstrated how each theory impacts church organization. Systems theory is highlighted as the most effective approach because it works well in rapid and radical environmental changes that are a fact of life for business and churches in the dawning of the twenty-first century.

Shawchuck and Heuser (1993a) also see systems theory as the most effective approach for church organization. Using the analogy of a pilot flying a plane, they identify the "instrument panel" for the church leader as consisting of

three major components: inputs, transforming process, and outputs. Inputs include human, technical, organizational, and social influences and resources, wanted or unwanted. The congregation's mission, its organizational structures and policies, its human relations, and its spirituality compose the transforming system. The influences and resources the church wants to put out into its environment—goals, programs, and ministry efforts—compose the outputs.

The authors state,

The gap between what the congregation *desires* to accomplish and what it *actually does* accomplish is more often than not a *symptom* of problems that are present in the relationships between the congregation's missions, structures, relationships, and spirituality. (214)

Luecke and Southard (1986) also present systems theory as the most effective approach for organizing the work of the church. They appreciate that systems thinking addresses both the purpose, the environment, and the relationships of a system or church. The pastor as administrator of the church must possess skills to keep the organization aimed at its proper purpose and to design appropriate structures to both support those purposes and to shape relationships.

George Barna (1991) says that successful churches have in common several characteristics related to leadership and organizational structure. He explains:

Although the successful churches did not utilize a common structure, they did subscribe to a common philosophy: *the ministry is not called to fit the church's structure; the structure exists to further effective ministry*. These churches had a keen sense of direction and purpose(i.e., vision and



plans). Their top priority was to achieve their ministry goals. If the organizational charts and structural procedures inhibited such ministry, they would cautiously but willingly work around the barriers. They were not about to let a man-made system hinder their ability to take advantage of a God-given opportunity to change lives for the Kingdom. Structure, in fact, was not an issue in these churches. Certainly, these congregations were led by individuals who see the wisdom of developing and maintaining orderly processes. They recognized the importance of a formal hierarchy of authority, and the importance of avoiding anarchy (even if the intentions of the anarchists are good). But structure was viewed as a support system, a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The structures they used had been developed, accepted, implemented, reevaluated and upgraded. At all times, the focus was upon ministry, not structure. (137-138)

Church growth research encourages congregations to diagnose their structures and systems through the eyes of systems thinking. By analyzing what is essential or what is lacking, the church can identify factors for spiritual health and ministry enlargement.

### **The Issue of Health**

A common theme in church growth literature is the importance of the health of the church organization. The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether a relationship exists between structures and the health and growth of a church. What is health?

Peter Wagner (1966a) gives seven vital signs of a healthy church: (1) the pastor; (2) the people of the church; (3) church size; (4) structure and functions; (5) homogeneous unit; (6) methods; and (7) priorities. The normal signs of life found in healthy, growing churches center around these seven indicators.

Leith Anderson (1992) offers the following characteristics as signs of health in a church: glorifying God; producing disciples; exercising spiritual gifts; reproducing through evangelism; incorporating newcomers; open to change; trusting God; and looking good on the outside. Anderson says, "Each church needs to define health for itself. That comes through a process of comparison, consultation, and self-evaluation" (128).

Charles Singletary (1986) identifies seven indicators of health in a growing church: (1) a strong emphasis on prayer; (2) an obvious ministry of the Holy Spirit; (3) biblical balance; (4) individual and organic reproduction; (5) high level of lay mobilization; (6) qualitative and quantitative growth of the membership; (7) healthy body life.

Rick Warren (1995) says, "Church growth is the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is *biblical* and our mission is *balanced*. Each of the five New Testament purposes of the church must be in equilibrium with the others for health to occur" (49). Warren defines the five purposes of the church as fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism.

Through careful research, Christian Schwarz (1996) verified the link between church health and growth. Schwarz created the *Natural Church Development Survey*. Through the use of this instrument he studied over one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on all five continents with the results confirming that healthy churches are making more and better disciples. Health

was defined as a harmonious interplay of eight qualities: empowering leadership, a gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, loving relationships. Schwarz maintains that no quality characteristic may be missing; all eight elements must be in the balance.

In each country studied, Schwarz normed the values obtained from the survey to a median of fifty, "i.e., the 'average church' for each country had a quality index of fifty for each of the eight characteristics" (38). Declining churches were below the median, while growing churches scored above the qualitative median in each of the eight categories.

The Natural Church Development Survey developed an empirical method for measuring the eight quality characteristics and for comparing them with one another. Researchers developed numerous questions that corresponded to the eight areas of health and that met two criteria:

- a. They had to show an empirically demonstrable connection (factor and item analysis) to the other questions on the same scale (=the same quality characteristic).
- b. They had to show a demonstrably positive connection to the quantitative growth of the church (criteria validity) (38).

Schwarz discovered a phenomenon in his study that he named the "65 hypothesis". The "65 hypothesis" says that whenever all eight values score 65 or higher, the statistical probability that the church is growing is 99.4 percent. Schwarz states, "This is one of the few church growth principles for which we have yet to find a single exception anywhere in the world" (40).

## **The Issue of Growth**

At first glance church growth appears to be overly concerned with numbers. In reality, the goal is disciples. Healthy churches grow.

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether a relationship exists between structure and the health and growth of a church. Lyle Schaller (1992c) says that as a church grows "structure becomes more prominent" (118). He identifies seven patterns of governance in Protestant churches in North America, viewed according to size:

1. Fewer than 45 at worship. A handful of volunteers runs the church. . .
2. 45 - 125 at worship. The official governing board and the minister, usually in that order, have most of the authority to make policy decisions. .
3. 120 - 240 at worship. The pastor is often the number one authority figure, the governing board is second, and a larger share of the power is deposited in committees. . . .
4. 225 - 450 at worship. a) The pastor holds a remarkably large amount of power. b) A substantial chunk of power and influence is held by other paid staff members. c) An occasional ad hoc committee exercises tremendous authority on a single issue. . . .
5. 450 - 1200 at worship. The major sources of power are information, competence, commitment, time, and specialized skills. The very large and ministry-driven congregation values knowledge about contemporary reality and a commitment to the vision that will shape the future. . . .
6. 1200 - 2800 at worship. The three most influential holders of power are (1) the senior minister and staff, (2) a series of ad hoc committees, and (3) the governing board. . . .
7. Over 2700 at worship. Run by the staff and a half-dozen or fewer volunteer leaders. The focus is on ministry and quality, not on enabling volunteers to make policy. All volunteer time is allocated to doing ministry, not administration. . . . (Schaller 1984b 117-121).

The impulse to restructure the system of governance should be a response to essential change and growth in the life and ministry of the church. Dann Spader, director of SonLife Ministries and Growing a Healthy Church seminars, says any time a church grows by 45 per cent it necessitates restructuring.

### **The Issue of Systems**

Every congregation constructs systems to organize and manage the ministry programs and to serve the people of their community. The question is, how will the congregation organize itself to achieve its purpose? Some of today's more common organizational systems are Traditional, Great Commission (MODEL Ministry), Life Systems, and The Meta-Church model.

Churches based upon tradition and ritual seem to put a greater premium on perpetuating the systems and structures than upon the quality of ministry (Barna, George, Schaller, Warren). They value history, denominational policy, family ties, time-honored practices, and doing things the way we have always done them. These churches are often in tension with newly created approaches that differ from their historical approach. Tradition rules and people, including the pastor and leaders, must acquiesce to the system.

An approach being embraced by the Free Methodist denomination to break out of tradition is the Great Commission Priorities approach, or MODEL Ministry (Spader, Mayes, Riemenschneider). Based upon a study of the life and ministry of Jesus, this approach is relationally centered and builds on five

essential ministry blocks: foundations, winning, building, equipping, multiplying leadership. MODEL is an acronym for Mission, Outreach, Discipleship, Equipping, Leadership. By balancing these five blocks, a church can have an effective ministry of winning, building, and sending disciples, carrying out Jesus' great commission.

Dan Reeves (1995) developed the Ten Life-Systems approach. After five years of working with small and mid-size congregations located in various parts of the country and of various denominational and theological persuasions, Reeves discovered that they were all asking the same questions. Four critical voids turned up time and time again: (1) How do we generate spiritual energy?; (2) How do we develop effective leaders?; (3) How do we increase people flow?; and, (4) How do we chart a direction amidst change? Reeves developed the Ten Life Systems as strategies to fill each of these four voids.

The Ten Life Systems are:

- Life System 1: The Pastor's Personal Development
- Life System 2: Corporate Intercession
- Life System 3: Spiritual Disciplines
- Life System 4: Mentoring
- Life System 5: Mobilizing
- Life System 6: People Flow Strategy
- Life System 7: Lifestyle Evangelism
- Life System 8: Future Planning
- Life System 9: Change and Communication Management
- Life System 10: Organizational Streamlining

According to Reeves, working with these ten life systems produces a healthy growth environment.

The Meta-Church model was developed by Carl George. George writes:

The prefix *meta*, meaning "change," emphasizes a change in order or pattern in how the members of the family of God relate to one another. It also represents a significant shift in how ministry is perceived: that the clergy's critical task is leadership formation(developing shepherders and other ranchers) rather than doing hands-on, primary-care ministry(being a shepherd). Finally, the term *Meta-Church* also represents an accompanying change in organizational priorities and structures. What does a Meta-Church look like? It is a growing, usually multistaff, local church committed to a joyous corporate worship of God(celebration), to formation of nurture groups and ministry teams(cells) led by lay pastors, and to an organization of professionals and volunteers that focuses on development of leadership for ministry. (188a)

The focus is on changing people into the image of Christ by developing cell-based ministries. Believers and seekers flow from small home-based groups to large church-wide celebrations. Nurture, care, and training all take place in the small group. The structure builds on a one-to-ten ratio of leaders and followers.

No one right or perfect system exists for any or all churches. A church needs to identify a system that is open to learn and flexible to change. Concern for organizational effectiveness in the midst of rapidly changing environmental conditions and a concern for clear direction based upon purpose and mission is essential for creating effective systems.

### **A Model Organization: Eight Essential Elements**

Looking at the issues of systems theory, family systems theory, the Bible and structure, church growth and structure, health, growth, and systems, a crucial understanding evolves that no one right structure or system exists for developing a healthy, growing church. Each church needs to know its community context and the strengths of their congregation. A ministry model

must be developed that fits the identity of that community context, congregational personality, and spiritual development of that local church. All models, systems and structures, need periodic reorganization.

Earlier health was defined as the harmonious interplay of eight quality characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships (Schwarz). These eight essential elements describe eight common factors found in growing, healthy churches. Although they are not complete lists of what comprises a healthy church, they do present eight focused areas of ministry that churches cannot afford to overlook. These eight essential elements provide a framework for a model structure for organizational health.

### 1. Empowering Leadership

The first element, "empowering leadership", refers to the pastor's ability to set a visionary direction for the church; establish goals and motivate people to work for the achievement of that vision. A host of authors (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Drucker, 1990b; Maxwell, 1995; Schaller, 1992; Wagner, 1984; George and Logan, 1987; Engstrom, 1976) explain the important role of visionary leadership in an organization, including the church.

Literature on the topic of leadership typically explores traits, roles, behaviors, or styles. Bennis and Nanus identified four traits common to ninety leaders they studied: attention to vision, meaning through communication, trust



through positioning, and management of self (1985). Hollander examined leadership as one among many roles that needed to be filled in an organization and suggested that it is a function of the organizational structure (1981).

Focusing upon the behavior of leaders, Drucker identified five practices shared by effective leaders: (1) knows where his/her time goes, (2) focuses on the outward contribution rather than internal issues, (3) builds on strengths, (4) concentrates on a few major areas, and (5) makes "effective" decisions (1966).

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) developed the "situational leadership model." They created a quadrant that describes four basic styles of leadership: high task and low relationship (telling); high task and high relationship (selling); high relationship and low task (participating); low task and low relationship (delegating). A leader's effectiveness is directly related to using the appropriate style in a given situation.

Burns (1978) distinguished between transactional and transforming leadership. Transactional leaders share in the mutual exchange of valued resources, recognizing that all parties contribute meaningfully to the goal. Transformational leaders engage participants so that they not only support the purpose but also move to a higher level of motivation and morality, transforming those involved.

Engstrom and Dayton (1976) identify five styles of leadership: bureaucratic, permissive, laissez faire, participative, and autocratic. They affirm that effective leadership is contingent upon personality, needs, and character of

the group and the situation. Each style has its strengths and weaknesses and the leader must decide what style is appropriate for a given situation.

Peter Wagner, a noted authority in church growth, writes that pastoral leadership is a key to church growth (1984). The pastor needs to be a visionary, goal setter, and manager as opposed to an enabler, implementer, or foreman. The pastor's role is to recruit, equip, delegate, and monitor the ministry of the people. The appropriate style of ministry depends upon five factors: (1) cultural limitations, (2) socioeconomic limitations, (3) denominational limitations, (4) congregational limitations, and (5) personality limitations. Wagner asserts that as a church grows the pastor needs to change his/her leadership style.

Lyle Schaller, one of the leading contributors to church growth literature, suggested that the size of a congregation is a determining factor to the style of leadership needed. Larger congregations demand a directive, initiating style of leadership, whereas a smaller congregation calls for a more democratic, participative style of leadership. Schaller claimed that the role of the pastor changed from being a "shepherd" who personally touches each sheep to being a "rancher" who delegates the care to others (1993).

Schwarz (1996) writes about the leadership style of pastors of growing churches as more "project- than people-oriented, more goal- than relationship-oriented, more authoritarian- than team-oriented" (22). His research revealed that "while pastors of growing churches are usually not 'people-persons' . . . on

the average they are somewhat more relationship-, person-, and partnership-oriented than their colleagues in declining churches" (22).

Growing, healthy churches have a pastor with vision for where the church should be going, who knows how to find and involve people in the life and ministry of the church, and empowers the people to become all that God wants them to be.

## 2. Gift-Oriented Ministry

The second quality characteristic, "gift-oriented ministry", answers the question, "Are the tasks in the church structured according to what spiritual gifts the individual believers have?" The Apostle Paul stated in Romans 12:6, "God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well" (The Living Bible). The Apostle Peter wrote, "Each one should use whatever gift he (or she) has received to serve others, faithfully administering the grace of God in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

Volumes have been written, mostly in the seventies, from a variety of theological positions on the subject of spiritual gifts (Flynn, 1974; Kinghorn, 1976; McRae, 1976; Stedman, 1972; Wagner, 1979). These writings affirm that church members should be involved in the ministry for which they are gifted. The role of church leadership is to help its members to identify and employ their gifts. When believers serve in their area of giftedness, the ministry is more effective, and they are more fulfilled.

Wagner offers "Five Steps Toward Discovering Your Spiritual Gift":

Step#1: Explore The Possibilities (Learn what the gifts are, what characterizes them, how they function in the body, etc.)

Step #2: Experiment With As Many As You Can (Don't be afraid to learn what gifts you don't have; it's just as important as knowing which ones you do have)

Step #3: Examine Your Feelings (Since God has put the body together, when we are functioning in the proper area we will be more effective and feel more fulfilled.)

Step #4: Evaluate Your Effectiveness (Gifts are given to produce results for growth in the body; exercising one's gift will produce--visibly--the result for which God designed the gift.)

Step #5: Expect Confirmation From The Body (This may be the most important step. If you have a particular gift, other Christians will recognize it and let you know.) (10).

Healthy, growing churches want to empower people for ministry by helping them identify and employ their spiritual gift.

### 3. Passionate Spirituality

"Passionate spirituality", the third element, describes an intensive prayer life and an enthusiastic and joyful faith. The decisive factor in church growth is not the doctrine or theological stance of the church but whether the believers live out their faith enthusiastically. Despite how orthodox a church is, if its members do not live their faith enthusiastically and share it joyfully, the church will not grow.

Spiritual passion can be evaluated by the concern believers have for their relationship with Jesus Christ. The importance of prayer and the application of God's Word to daily life are two factors that are consistent in the lives of growing believers and growing churches. During the past decade, writers such as Dallas Willard and Richard Foster have challenged churches to give more serious consideration to their beliefs about and practices in the spiritual disciplines.

#### 4. Functional Structures

The fourth element, "functional structures", answers the question, "Is the organization of the church structured according to its usefulness and effectiveness for the growth of the church?" The purpose of the church is to engage its people in God's mission in the world. The organizational structure of the church should not tie up the believer's time in an "activity trap" of church meetings and programs. Effective congregations streamline the organization so that the people can be freed up to be involved in God's mission in the world.

Schwarz writes:

One of the biggest barriers to recognizing the significance of structures for church development is the widespread view that "structure" and "life" are opposites. Interestingly enough, biological research reveals that dead matter and living organisms are not distinguished by their substance, . . . but by the specific *structure* of the relationship of the individual parts to each other. In other words, in God's creation the living and nonliving, the biotic and abiotic, are formed from identical material substances and are distinguished only by their structure. (29)

Bob Buford, chairman of the board of Leadership Network, reflected on the most important lessons he and Leadership Network had learned from Peter Drucker. While the list was long, he excerpted ten for the seventy-fifth issue of NetFax:

1. The mission comes first. The mission of nonprofits (including churches) is changed lives.
2. The function of management is to make the church more church-like, not to make the church more business-like.
3. An organization begins to die the day it begins to be run for the benefit of the insiders and not for the benefit of the outsiders.

4. Know the value of planned abandonment...you must decide what not to do.
5. Know the value of foresight...you can't predict the future, but you must assess the futurity of present events.
6. Focus on opportunities, not on problems. Most organizations assign their best resources to their problems, not their opportunities.
7. Management is a social function and has mostly to do with people, not techniques and procedures.
8. People decisions are the ultimate control mechanism of an organization. That's where people look to find out what values you really hold.
9. All work is work for a team. : No individual has the temperament and the skills to do every job. The purpose of a team is to make strengths productive and weaknesses irrelevant.
10. The three most important questions are "What is our business?", "Who is the customer?", and "What does the customer consider value?" (NetFax 75, 7-7-97)

The development of structures that are open and flexible enables the people of God to accomplish their ministry vision through an appropriate deployment of people, resources, and ministry processes.

#### 5. Inspiring Worship Services

"Inspiring worship services", the fifth element, asks, "Is the worship service an inspiring event for those who attend?" Whatever form a church service may take, liturgical or free, targeted for saints or seekers, traditional or contemporary, an inspiring worship experience for the attenders affects the growth of the church. When worship is inspiring, it draws people to the services.

A tasteful place for worship, a well-organized greeting team, a competent worship leader, a meaningful order of worship, quality music, the active involvement of the congregation, quality child care, inspiring preaching, timely

announcements, etc., create a conducive atmosphere for a positive worship experience. Still, what is more important in inspiring worship services is that the presence of God is felt and lives are transformed. Worship is "an active response to the person and work of God", and the goal of worship is "to inspire unchurched people in a way that they would feel they have met with God" (Logan 76).

## 6. Holistic Small Groups

Element number six, "holistic small groups", refers to a system of small groups in which the needs of the individual believer are being met. Growing churches have a system of small groups in which Christians find caring, sharing, relationship building, and fellowship.

The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea is the largest church in the world, approaching one million members. This church has gotten larger by becoming smaller. Ten to twenty people make up a cell group and are led by some 50,000-plus home-group leaders. This system enables each of one million individuals to receive individual spiritual attention (George 1991c 22).

Dale Galloway, Carl George, Bob Logan and Christian Schwarz, among a host of other church growth experts, all agree that the larger a church becomes the more important is the role of small groups in the life of the church.

Schwarz writes:

Our research confirms that the larger a church becomes, the more decisive the small group principle will be with respect to her further growth. After we had processed all 4.2 million survey answers, we calculated which of the 170 variables had the most significant relationship

to church growth . . . If we were to identify any one principle as the "most important" . . . then without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups. (33)

## 7. Need-Oriented Evangelism

The seventh element is "need-oriented evangelism". Evangelism is not viewed only as a verbal action, but as a relationship; a ministry to the total person, including personal and social needs. Healthy churches target the people and needs that they can best reach then apply their resources to win the lost, build the believers, and train more workers. The starting point for growing, healthy churches is the needs of the people who are to be reached.

Peter Wagner asserts that every congregation includes persons who have the "gift" of evangelism. These persons should be identified, trained, and employed in ministries to reach the lost. Others should be encouraged and trained to use their gifts as well to serve non-Christians with whom they have a personal relationship.

Established church growth research (Arn, Hunter, Schaller, Towns, Wagner) shows that the gospel spreads best along relational lines and social networks of living Christians. Hunter says the problem is a "stereotype" about the kind of people who evangelize, how they make people feel, what they do, and what they say. In reality, he goes on to say, Christians are better prepared to do the work of evangelism than they know, because they are the kind and caring people most people would love to become (State of the Art 80).



A differentiation between the effectiveness of evangelism "methods" or "programs" and evangelism "principles" needs to be made. Although churches have used programs like Evangelism Explosion or Reach Out In Love with a measure of "success", this does not validate these evangelistic approaches as a principle for church growth. Methods vary from time to time and place to place; principles are unchanging and universal. The key to church growth is to focus on evangelistic efforts that answer the questions and meet the needs of non-Christians.

George Hunter asks the question, "What kind of church reaches secular people?" Hunter develops an "apostolic" model, approaching ministry as the apostles did:

An apostolic leader reaches a . . . distinct population. . . begins communicating the gospel, raises up some converts, forms them into a congregation, equips the congregation for its mission, grounds the people in the beliefs, life-style, and vision that inform and energize the mission, and eventually some of its members become apostles to other populations. (110)

Hunter says, an apostolic congregation knows:

1. ...that people who aren't disciples are lost.
2. ...that "lost people matter to God"
3. ...that their church is primarily a mission to lost people.
4. ...the importance of high expectations for their people.
5. ...what to change and what to preserve.
6. ...the importance of understanding, loving and liking secular people.
7. ...the importance of accepting unchurched people.
8. ...the importance of using music that secular people understand.
9. ...the importance of starting new congregations.
10. ...the importance of involvement in world mission (9).

Evangelism is the relationship-building ministry of the church by which God's people use their gifts to meet the needs of their social network and by their words and action win lost people to Jesus Christ.

## 8. Loving Relationships

The eighth element is "loving relationships". Growing, healthy churches are characterized by a high degree of love of Christians for each other and for outsiders. In loving churches, Christians spend quality time with one another, caring, sharing, helping and enjoying life together. Church leadership continually encourages and praises others. They develop strategies for showing love to those outside the church, and the church provides opportunities for developing and deepening relationships inside and outside the fellowship of believers.

Win Arn, a church growth specialist, did a study in the mid-eighties on the relationship between a church's ability to love and its ability to reach new people and grow (1986). This study included 8658 persons from thirty-nine denominations and 168 churches who responded to a survey, revealing insights about the "state of love" between Christians and American churches. Researchers discovered that love is both an attitude and an action that can be learned and practiced: "Love is intentionally doing something caring or helpful for another person, in Jesus' name, regardless of the cost or consequence to oneself" (25).

Arn said we need to love because we are loved, we were created to love, because others need our love, and because God wants us to love. His discovery was nothing new, just a restatement of biblical truths and values:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

For God so loved the world that He gave . . . (John 3:16).

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (I John 4:7).

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (I John 3:18).

All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. (John 13:35)

The first priority and the central mission of the church, Arn says, should be love. All subsequent ministries of the church can be built on this love foundation. Arn offers eight reasons why love should be the priority of the church:

1. A loving church sees sinners repent, become Christians, and responsible church members.
2. A loving church authenticates its message.
3. A loving church contributes to the joy, health, and vitality of its individual members.
4. A loving church attracts members.
5. A loving church assimilates and holds people.
6. A loving church runs more smoothly.
7. A loving church is obedient to God's command.
8. A loving church is the best hope for changing our community...our world. (125 - 131)

Research indicates a highly significant relationship exists between the ability of a church to demonstrate love and its growth potential (Arn, 1986; Schwarz, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

Over the past forty years, volumes have been written on management, organizational development, systems thinking, structural dynamics, church growth and leadership. Applications of these theories have informed business, education, government, non-profit organizations and churches.

Church organizations depend upon systems and structures for their health and effectiveness. Both our organizational structures and our conceptual constructs need to harmonize with our purpose and mission. Churches work the way they work because of how the people in them think and interact.

Healthy churches systems are open, flexible, changing. They move away from authoritarian and hierarchical functions and concentrate on vision, purpose, values, integrity, dialogue, and systems thinking. Growth is a natural byproduct of healthy churches. Life produces life. Purpose-driven structures produce healthy, growing churches. The eight essential elements described above are the eight critical components comprising the structure of growing, healthy churches.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Design of the Study**

Administrative structures and systems are the vital features of an organization that help to determine its health and development or lack thereof. If congruence occurs between an organization's purpose and structure, there can be impressive results. Conversely, an inappropriate structure thwarts the fulfillment of an organization.

Within local churches, though several variables influence the health of the organization, the one that exerts a significant impact is the administrative structure or system. The organizational patterns that congregations follow to keep in balance their purpose, relationships, and spirituality, affect—negatively or positively—the health of the church.

### **The Problem And Purpose**

A church is a complex organization that requires skillful leadership to accomplish its purpose and mission. If pastors are to lead their congregations to be healthy, they must understand and direct the organizational systems and structures. Most pastors lack training or understanding of organizational systems and are unprepared to give direction to evaluating and improving church structures.

This study is a single, descriptive case study designed to help me gain an understanding of the relationship between church structures and church health.

I proposed this study to identify similarities among the church structures and the health and growth of the Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York.

## **Research Questions**

This project addressed three questions:

### **Research Question #1:**

What similarities exist among observed church growth and the organizational system of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past three decades, 1971-1996?

Northgate Free Methodist Church grew from an average worship attendance of 127 in 1971 to 251 in 1996. Three different pastors gave leadership to the church during that time; Pastor Hessler (1968-1979), Pastor Bates (1979-1991), and Pastor Pierce (1991-1996). These pastors had differing gifts and leadership styles. Under their leadership, the church experienced continual growth as well as dramatic reorganization of ministry systems and structures.

### **Operational Question #1:**

Was there a written plan for church growth in each of the periods?

### **Operational Question #2:**

What were the significant differences between how the ministry was structured in the seventies, eighties and nineties?

Operational Question #3:

How were structures evaluated to determine their functionality?

Research Question #2:

What positive impact did a paradigm shift in structures of power (from authoritarian to purpose-driven) have on church health and growth?

Management styles and ministry models have changed dramatically over the past twenty-five years. In the seventies, an authoritarian and hierarchical form of leadership, predominantly pastor led, was the norm. In the eighties, the church developed a democratic commission system, governed by an official board based upon selective representation. Board and committee meetings dominated the church schedule and the people's time. Ministry came to equal a position or office on a board or committee. A mindset developed that this activity equaled ministry. A sense of turf or control also evolved and many committees slipped into a posture of permission granting or denying. In the nineties, churches organized around their vision, values, purpose, and giftedness. The ministry of the church goes on at the program level. Lay persons take the responsibility to lead, risk, create, accept new challenges, and trust God for success in ministering to persons.

Northgate Church has made strategic changes to restructure the church system of governance and organization, moving from an authoritarian structure toward becoming a purpose-driven church. The basic design of a purpose-driven church is that the staff provides vision and direction, the governing board

provides policy and leadership, and the members of the body are involved in hands-on ministry.

Operational Question #1:

Who assumed the primary responsibility for setting the visionary direction and establishing goals for the church?

Operational Question #2:

Which leadership activities were delegated to others for ministry which did not conform to the pastor's spiritual gifts?

Operational Question #3:

In what ways did the church organize around a clear sense of purpose?

Research Question #3:

What limitations were observed in the ministry paradigms that impacted church health and growth?

Church structures are relative and need to be changed periodically. No one right system or structure exists for all times. A church needs consistently to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of its systems and programs. Structures need to be evaluated to determine their functionality, eliminating or changing ineffective structures. Meaningful structures, not yet in place, should be identified and implemented along with ways of investing the strengths of the church to improve the systems and structures.



Operational Question #1:

What were the limiting factors of the administrative structures of each era?

Operational Question #2:

What purposeful direction could be observed in our activities for each of these eras?

Operational Question #3:

In what ways did the leadership develop strategic and concrete action plans?

## **Data Sources**

The collection of data for this study was gathered from the past twenty-five year history, 1971 - 1996, of Northgate Free Methodist Church. These years represent a changing paradigm in structures of power from authoritarian to a purpose-driven model. These years also represent the greatest decadal growth of Northgate's history. Data was gathered from two primary sources: (1). archival records; and (2) a survey of past and present key lay leaders.

The archival records consisted of yearbook reports, pastor's cabinet minutes, a 1978 self study report, flowcharts, and a 1988 church growth consultation report.

The leaders for this study were selected on the basis of being considered as the core committed persons, those most involved in the center of the church's life and ministry. Of the twenty-four selected, twenty-one had been members of the pastor's cabinet; the leadership, policy-setting, decision-making body of

Northgate Church. Eight leaders were identified from the seventies, eight from the eighties, and eight from the nineties. They were asked to answer the survey questions as represented the church's ministry for the time period selected and to relate the situations mentioned to our church for that time.

### **Instrumentation Reliability and Validity**

The primary instrument used in conducting this research was the *Natural Church Development Survey* developed by *ChurchSmart Resources* (see Appendix, Figure 1). The survey instrument was first developed by the Institute for Church Development located in Germany and was later translated and revised by *ChurchSmart Resources*. This instrument is a paper-and-pencil inventory that asks the leader to grade the health of the church on the basis of eight quality characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships. The results are tabulated through a computer program and a complete report, a "church profile", including suggestions on how to raise your health levels, is mailed back to the church from *ChurchSmart*. The survey provides a descriptive picture of the perceived degree of health of the church.

This instrument was used in the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the causes of church growth. More than one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on all five continents took part in this project. Christoph Schalk, a social scientist and psychologist, designed the questionnaire with

rigorous standards for objectivity, reliability, and validity (Natural Church Development, 1996). This instrument is being used in this study to determine the perceived degree of health and its impact upon the growth of the congregation.

### **Data Collection**

Information concerning attendance and pastoral records was collected from the yearbook of the Free Methodist Church, produced annually, for the designated years of the study, 1971 - 1996. These books are compiled by the denomination and are a part of the church library. This data was used to determine the growth rate and pastoral tenure.

Church records were also studied, giving particular attention to a self study, a church growth consultation report, flowcharts, and administrative records. I examined official minutes of board, cabinet, and society meetings from the past three decades; a 1978 self study report; and a 1988 church growth consultation report. As I read these reports and minutes, I looked for materials that addressed the purpose, mission, objectives, and organization of the church.

The Natural Church Development pencil-and-paper inventory was distributed to twenty-four key lay leaders (see Appendix, Figure 1). I explained the nature of the project and the directions for taking the survey to the lay leaders (see Appendix, Figure 3). The surveys were collected and sent to ChurchSmart Resources for computer tabulation.

## **Variables and Scales**

The *independent variable* in this study measured by the inventories was the structure of governance. In this study, I presumed that the congregational structure influenced the rate of worship attendance growth. The *dependent variable* was the size of the average worship attendance measured annually. This was measured on a quantitative scale based upon the percentage of annual increases.

## **Control**

The results of this study were controlled by the researcher's selection process of key lay leaders. Primarily persons who had served on the pastor's cabinet were viewed as key lay leaders and asked to participate in the surveys. The questions asked pertained only to administrative structures and perceptions of health.

## **Data Analysis**

To determine if similarities exist among administrative structures and growth in church attendance, a descriptive analysis of all independent and dependent variables was conducted. All information used in the analysis was derived from questionnaire data, church records, and input from key lay leaders .

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings of the Study

This study identified eight factors that are crucial to the structure of a healthy church. Twenty-four leaders from the past twenty-five-year history of Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York, were surveyed to assess the quality of those eight essential elements at Northgate. The health quotients from the surveys were compared with the worship attendance figures to determine if similarities exist among church structures and the growth of the church. This chapter presents that data.

*Twenty-four Natural Church Development: Eight Essential Elements Surveys* (see page 52), along with a cover letter describing the study, were sent to twenty-four key lay leaders. Within four weeks of the mailing, all twenty-four were returned. Only one person from group B, the eighties, declined to participate. His replacement was selected from the long-term members inventory and the replacement responded positively and in a timely manner. The total response of all the surveys was 96 percent.

The surveys were sent to ChurchSmart for computer tabulation. ChurchSmart is a church growth research and resource ministry located in Carol Stream, Illinois. Dave Wetzler serves as Director and CEO, and Bob Logan, an internationally recognized authority in church planting and church growth, serves as Director of Research and Development. Their mission is to produce products

to help church leaders in the areas of church planting, church growth, church renewal, and leadership development.

Within a week, a report was received. This report included a church profile, giving "health quotients" for each of the eight essential elements and a "quality index" for each decade of the study (Table 1). The values were normed to a median of fifty with a standard deviation of fifteen, i.e., the "average church" has a quality index of fifty for each of the eight characteristics. A deviation of plus or minus fifteen is common for this survey instrument. A score between thirty-five and sixty-five is normal—sometimes a little better, sometimes a little weaker. The scales have a reliability between  $r=0.75$  and  $r=0.89$  depending upon the specific scale.

Typically, a church profile is based upon twenty to thirty surveys. This study included twenty-four surveys graded in three groups of eight, according to the decade the participant was involved in church leadership. Because of the smaller sample of groups of eight and the fact that two-thirds of those completing the survey were relying on distant memories from the seventies and eighties, the validity and reliability factors may not be as accurate as desired by a researcher. The results do provide interesting historical perspective. They identify movement or trends in the eight quality characteristics.

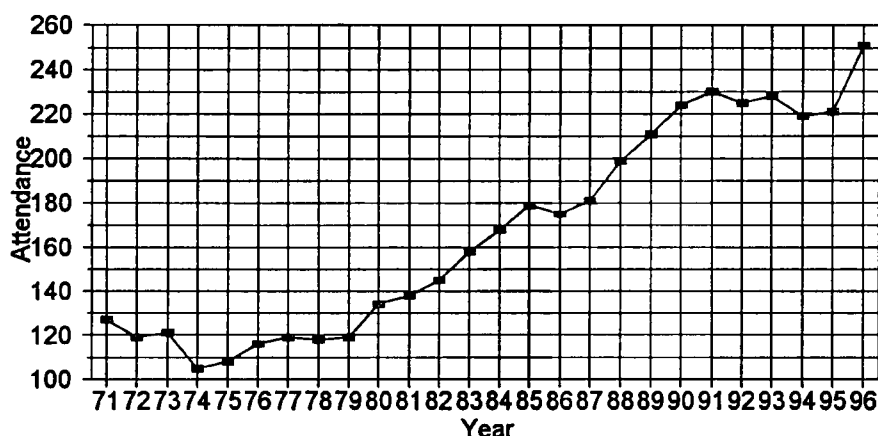
**Table 1 - Survey Results**

<b>Quality</b>	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Group C</b>
Leadership	-3	7	44
Ministry	33	42	70
Spirituality	41	22	51
Structures	24	11	48
Worship	17	28	68
Small Groups	22	25	45
Evangelism	24	29	48
Relationships	24	43	45
<b>Quality Index</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>52</b>

The scores from the surveys were divided into three groups (Table 1). Group A represented the input of the leaders of the seventies and their perception of the health of the church for that decade. Group B represented the eighties and group C the nineties. A total of eight scores was placed in each group for each of the eight essential elements. These scores—"health quotients"—were averaged and a "quality index" was identified for each group: group A, scored twenty-three; group B, scored twenty-six; and, group C, scored fifty-two. The quality index was compared with the decadal growth rates of

worship attendance to see if there are similarities among the structures and growth rate of the church (Table 2).

**Table 2 - Attendance Profile  
1971 - 1996**



## Research Findings

### Research Question #1:

*What similarities exist among observed church growth and the organizational system of the Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past three decades, 1971-1996?*

In this study, I defined health as the harmonious interplay of empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. The organizational system of a healthy, growing church is comprised of these eight critical components.



Table 1 shows the quality index of Northgate Free Methodist Church for the seventies, eighties, and nineties (groups A, B, and C), measuring these eight essential elements of a healthy system. Again, the values were normed to a median of fifty with a standard deviation of fifteen--scores between thirty-five and sixty-five are normal. Group A (seventies) scored twenty-three, group B (eighties) scored twenty-six, and group C (nineties) scored fifty-two. Little difference appeared in the average score of groups A and B--both in the below average negative range-- while group C scored considerably higher--in the normal range.

Table 2 shows the worship attendance profile for the past twenty-five years. Group A experienced a decline from 127 to 119, or a 6.8 percent decrease. Group B experienced substantial growth, from 134 to 211 in attendance, or 57.5 per cent growth. Group C also had significant growth, from 224 to 251, or 12 per cent growth.

Pastoral tenures over-lapped in all three groups. To gain a more accurate picture of the similarities among the different pastoral leadership styles and the growth of the three groups, an equal slice of each decade was examined: 1971-1976; 1981-1986; and 1991-1996. These periods represent the early years of each of the three pastor's tenures. Group A decreased in attendance from 127 to 116, or 9.5 percent. Group B grew from 138 to 175, or 26.8 percent. Group C grew from 230 to 251, or 9.2 percent. A comparison of

the first six years of each decade reveals similar findings to decadal performance.

The quality index scores for the eight essential elements of a healthy system do not match the growth performance of groups B and C. Comparisons of the health quotients and growth rate of Northgate Free Methodist Church did not demonstrate similarities among the organizational system and the growth of the church over the past twenty-five years.

Operational Question #1:

*Was there a written plan for church growth in each of the periods?*

No records were found from the seventies to indicate a written plan for growth was developed by group A. In the eighties, group B brought in a church growth consultant and developed a strategy calendar with goals, activities, and events for increased ministries. In the nineties, group C held annual leadership retreats at which they developed vision and strategy goals. It was stated at the 1993 retreat, for example, that Northgate Free Methodist Church could be a congregation of 250 in one year and 500 in seven years. Specific strategies were developed for evangelism, assimilation, and leadership development.

Operational Question #2:

*What were the significant differences between how the ministry was structured in the seventies, eighties, and nineties?*

Northgate Free Methodist Church had three pastoral tenures during the twenty-five-year period of this study. Pastor Hessler was appointed from 1968 to

1979; Pastor Bates from 1979 to 1991; and, Pastor Pierce from 1991 to the present. These pastors have differing gifts and leadership styles and structured the ministries accordingly. Concrete action plans evolved from their particular philosophy of ministry.

The qualitative health of the church, including its strengths and weaknesses, is seen in the balance of the eight essential elements (Table 3). One of the eight quality characteristics is always the current minimum factor. The minimum factor is an area needing attention to increase the growth potential of the church. Higher scores reflect an area of strength in the ministry of the church.

**Table 3 - Strengths and Weaknesses**

<b>Quality</b>	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Group C</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Structures</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Worship</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Small Groups</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Evangelism</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>45</b>

A comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the three groups (Table 3) reveals that *empowering leadership* was the weakest characteristic for all three pastors. Group A scored a minus three; while group B, a seven; and group C, a forty-four. The strength of group A was *passionate spirituality* (forty-one), while for group B it was *loving relationships* (forty-three), and for group C it was *gift-oriented ministry* (seventy).

**Table 4 - Dominant Qualities in rank order**  
**Top = strongest quality      Bottom = weakest quality**

Group A	Group B	Group C
spirituality (41)	relationships (43)	ministry (70)
ministry (33)	ministry (42)	worship (68)
relationships* (24)	evangelism (29)	spirituality (51)
evangelism* (24)	worship (28)	structures*(48)
structures* (24)	small groups (25)	evangelism*(48)
small groups (22)	spirituality (22)	relationships*(45)
worship (17)	structures (11)	small group*(45)
leadership (-3)	leadership (7)	leadership(44)

\*indicates same score on quality index

A low score indicates a perceived weakness. A higher score would represent a strength. Weakest characteristics show the greatest obstacles to

health and growth, while strongest characteristics show effective areas of ministry.

When the top three qualities are examined in all three groups, *ministry* shows up three times, and *spirituality* and *relationships* twice. The church has consistently had good lay leadership, a passion for spiritual matters, and a desire for loving relationships.

One area of noted contrast is the area of *worship* (group A scored seventeen; group B, twenty-eight; and group C, sixty-eight). Worship services are perceived to be more inspiring in the nineties than they were in the seventies and eighties. Of the eight qualities, *inspiring worship* ranked seventh for group A, fourth for group B, and second for group C.

The scores and ranking order show some of the differences in how the ministry was structured in the seventies, eighties and nineties (Table 4). It appears that Pastor Hessler emphasized spirituality, Pastor Bates emphasized relationships, and Pastor Pierce emphasized gift-based ministry.

### Operational Question #3:

*How were structures evaluated to determine their functionality?*

Over the twenty-five-year history studied, organizational diagrams were found that portrayed the church's structure. Flow charts showed the relationship between various ministry areas.

In the seventies, Northgate followed a denominational organizational model—committees for administration, education, and service. It appears that

little evaluation occurred to identify which structures were effective or ineffective, since little change occurred in the church structure for that time period.

In the eighties, Pastor Bates identified and introduced a new organizational structure. As the church experienced growth, it was necessary to look at ways of extending effective structures, eliminating ineffective structures, and identifying and implementing new structures. To meet the needs of a growing congregation, he proposed a commission system which was adopted in March of 1980. Although it appears that the impetus came from Pastor Bates and from a model structure he had experienced in his previous appointment.

In the eighties and early nineties, the commissions grew to an unwieldy size, some having as many as twenty-seven members. In 1993, I worked with the nominating committee to evaluate the commissions and their many sub-committees. The primary question this group explored was, "Does our current ministry structure fit our size, times, complexity of program, and vision?"

The commission system is still in existence but was modified in 1994. Upon the nominating committee's recommendation, the commissions were reduced to nine members, having three classes in an elected rotation of three years each. Many of the sub-committees were eliminated. The goal was to have a streamlined organization that freed people from endless business meetings and to engage them in gift-oriented, purpose-driven ministries. New job descriptions were written, spiritual gifts classes were offered, and the

congregation was encouraged to give five hours of service per week in the area of ministry for which they were gifted.

Research Question #2:

*What positive impact did a paradigm shift in structures of power (from authoritarian to purpose-driven) have on church health and growth?*

In the seventies, the ministry was predominantly pastor led. In the eighties, the ministry was bureaucratically led. In the nineties, the ministry is gift-based and mission-driven.

Table 5 shows the *quality index* for the seventies, eighties, and nineties (group A, B, and C), measuring the eight essential elements of a healthy system. On the *quality index*, group A (seventies) scored twenty-three, group B (eighties) scored twenty-six, and group C (nineties) scored fifty-two. Little difference appears in the average score of groups A and B, while group C scored considerably higher. Apparently, the present leaders perceive the church to be much healthier now than the leaders of the two previous decades. It appears that a purpose-driven system is preferred to an authoritarian or bureaucratic system

Changes in structures of power is perhaps best reflected in the area of *gift-oriented ministry* (Table 5). Group C scored seventy, which is markedly higher than group A's thirty-three and group B's forty-two. The primary goal of restructuring in 1994 was to have the church become mission-driven and to empower and involve qualified lay persons in ministry. When gifted lay persons

receive permission to lead, risk, create, accept new challenges, and trust God for success in ministry, the church can achieve more with less effort.

Another quality characteristic that shows a positive change occurred as a result of becoming a purpose-driven organization is the area of *functional structures* (Table 5). Group A scored twenty-four, group B scored eleven, and group C scored forty-eight. While structure does not cause growth, it allows growth. If you pour a pile of sand on a table, it forms a pyramid. The pyramid cannot grow and increase any larger than the structural base of the table. Current leadership indicated that the organizational structure of the nineties is more effective for ministry and growth.

**Table 5 - Quality Index**

<b>Quality</b>	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Group C</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>70</b>
Spirituality	41	22	51
<b>Structures</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48</b>
Worship	17	28	68
Small Groups	22	25	45
Evangelism	24	29	48
Relationships	24	43	45
<b>Quality Index</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>52</b>



Operational Question #1:

*Who assumed primary responsibility for setting the visionary direction and establishing goals for the church?*

Since in all three groups the lowest score on the quality index was *leadership*, it seems safe to say that it was not the pastor assuming primary responsibility for setting the vision and establishing the goals for the church. Or at least the lay leaders did not see the pastors as giving strong motivation and support to mentor individuals, multiply ministries, and enable them to become all that God wants them to be.

*Gift-oriented ministry* scored high for all three groups. It was number one for group C, and number two for groups A and B. When people serve in their area of giftedness, they generally are more effective and more contented. They also function more in the power of the Holy Spirit and less in their own strength. A broader base of ownership and leadership evolves.

Northgate Free Methodist Church is blessed with strong lay leadership over the past three decades. The church leadership in conversation and with the help of surveys have identified the pastor's cabinet as the vision-casting and goal-setting body of the church. The pastor's cabinet meets monthly with the pastor to discuss ministry development, establish action plans, analyze program effectiveness, pray, and prioritize.

Operational Question #2:

*Which leadership activities were delegated to others for ministry which did not conform to the pastor's spiritual gifts?*

In conversation with church leaders I was told that Pastor Hessler and Pastor Bates followed the enabler model of leadership. This type of leader understands how things are accomplished and enables others to achieve goals. Enablers are people-oriented rather than task-oriented. They make decisions through collegiality, mutuality, and group activity (Wagner 1984). The leadership style of the seventies, as well as the size of the congregation at that time, lent itself to the pastor being an enabler and functioning as a chaplain. The chaplain did not delegate ministry, he performed ministry. He was the shepherd, called of God to serve the people.

Pastor Bates had the heart of a shepherd and the mind of an administrator. This, combined with a consensus style of leadership, created a philosophy of ministry in the eighties of ownership by involvement. The goal was to make everybody happy by creating an official position for them. Hence, the nominating ballot for 1991 had 122 positions. On paper it appeared that there was a lot of delegated leadership in this committee system, but in reality Pastor Bates attended most of the committee meetings, and often wrote the agendas or chaired the meetings.

I stopped attending committee meetings in 1992. I phoned the chair person and asked if they needed any input from me for their agenda. I offered

them what advice and resources were deemed necessary and affirmed their ability to give good leadership to their board. The chair person was informed that I would not be attending and that I looked forward to a report of their actions. Chair persons were also encouraged to cancel meetings if there was not a sufficient agenda to merit a meeting.

At first there was some resistance to this approach. Some chair people did not feel qualified to conduct business without the pastor present to resource them. They got over it. Meetings were canceled when there was not an agenda. The ministry went on without their monthly business meeting. Some concerns were raised about the organizational structure. This was a time of disequilibrium.

The disequilibrium was deliberate. The people needed to stop and evaluate the organizational system of the church. To do that they needed to be uncomfortable with business as usual and ask: "What are we doing? Why? Where are we headed? Is this a goal worth achieving?"

I began working with the pastor's cabinet and the nominating committee to answer the basic question, "What is our purpose?" After a long process, we adopted a mission statement defining our purpose: "Northgate Church exists to bring people to Jesus Christ and to build them up in that relationship."

The next job was to clean up the organizational structure. We wanted to provide sound administrative procedures and clearly define the functional and decision-making processes. In 1994 a new structure was adopted. This

structure was purpose-driven, gift-based, permission-granting, leader-led, prayer-based, and Great Commission focused. The basic design was developed so that the staff would provide vision and direction, the pastor's cabinet would provide policy, and the congregation would be involved in hands-on ministry. The result of this design is that more ministry is occurring, more people are involved, leaders are being developed, and the pastor is able to concentrate on those ministry tasks that he is gifted to do, while others do the same.

Operational Question #3:

*In what ways did the church organize around a clear sense of purpose?*

Every committee, program, ministry, and organization in the church needs a clear purpose. The structure often exists solely because the denomination promoted it, the pastor asked for it, or another church succeeded with it. Some churches are driven by tradition, some by personalities, or programs, events, finances, or buildings. Every church needs to answer the question, "Why do we exist?" The church functions best when it defines its purpose.

As stated above, in the seventies Northgate Free Methodist Church structured its ministries around a denominational model—committees for administration, education, and service. Purpose was more a matter of function, i.e., administration equaled taking care of property and finances; education equaled Sunday school and Christian education programs; service equaled communion preparation, flowers for church, visitation, and hospitality.

In 1978 a pastor's advisory committee was formed to meet once a month with the pastor. They suggested four points for the purpose and function of the church: (1) worship, (2) witness to win souls, (3) training for Christian living, and (4) willing to serve. (Congregational Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1978) This committee began to more clearly define, "Why do we exist?" However, the organization of the church remained the same.

In March of 1980, Pastor Bates introduced a new organizational structure called a commission system. Under this new system, the pastor's cabinet was given the task to "envision, formulate, motivate, and evaluate." Three commissions--Christian education, outreach, and worship--each had several sub-committees. The purpose of the commissions was "to coordinate related functions, and encourage growth and development in each area of responsibility." The purpose of the committees was "to pray, plan, and implement specific program ministry" (Congregational Meeting Minutes, March 3, 1980).

This restructuring helped answer the question why the church existed and solidified what the church was supposed to do. The three commissions focused on three purposes of the church--worship, outreach (evangelism), and education (discipleship). A church becomes healthier and stronger by being purpose-driven. The result for Northgate was a decade of 57.5 percent growth--from 134 to 211 in worship attendance.

The commission system has continued into the nineties. In 1994 a major revision occurred when the nominating committee introduced a size limit--nine members on a commission; term-limits--six years then a mandated year off; and a policy that one can serve on only one committee or commission at a time. A philosophical change was introduced: Ministry is a relationship, not a position or office. Our desire was to free persons from the activity trap of church meetings so they could use their time to build loving relationships and use their spiritual gifts in ministry.

The pastor's cabinet read Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Church and discussed how to implement the concepts found in this book. Northgate is working on organizing its ministries around the five purposes of the church: (1) worship, (2) ministry, (3) evangelism, (4) fellowship, and (5) discipleship.

Research Question #3:

*What limitations were observed in the ministry paradigms that impacted church health and growth?*

Church structures are relative and need to be changed periodically. No one right system or structure exists for all times. A church needs to consistently evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of its systems and programs. Structures need to be evaluated to determine their functionality. The evaluation leads to eliminating or changing ineffective structures. Meaningful structures, not yet in place, should be identified and implemented along with ways of investing the strengths of the church to improve the systems and structures.

Operational Question #1:

*What were the limiting factors of the administrative structures of each era?*

Group A scored seventeen in *worship*. It could be concluded that a limitation of the ministry of the seventies was worship. Whether it was fewer enthusiastic Christians attending, fewer gifted leaders taking part, lesser quality services or child-care, the leaders surveyed did not find worship to be an inspiring strength of the church.

Group B scored eleven in the area of *structures*. The leaders surveyed viewed this area to be a weakness or limitation, but this does not correspond to the dynamic growth of the eighties. Structures have no other legitimation than to allow growth. As described above, for the pyramid to grow requires a large enough foundation or structure. The pyramid cannot grow beyond the dimensions of the base. Perhaps the weakness was in the philosophy of ministry--ownership by involvement--and the mindset that evolved from that--ministry equals a position or office.

The limitation of the nineties appears to be *relationships*. Group C scored forty-five in this area. I am a task-oriented rather than a people-oriented leader. Perhaps this score reflects my leadership style. At any rate, group C needs to work at developing and deepening loving relationships. Group C scored forty-five in the area of *small groups* as well. These two areas could be developed together with small groups that provide the chance to share with others and build personal relationships.

Operational Question #2:

*What purposeful direction could be observed in our activities for each of these eras?*

Our purposes are the standard by which we evaluate our effectiveness. The programs, ministries, events, and activities of the church should help the people develop a lifestyle of worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, and ministry. These are the five purposes of the church. The *Natural Church Development* model says that a healthy church also keeps in balance all eight critical components of ministry—empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.

Worship. In the seventies *worship* scored a low of seventeen, although a couple of purposeful worship activities can be noted from church records. A Junior Church program was started to minister to families and in particular to their children. A radio ministry was also started in the seventies for shut-ins and the unchurched.

In the eighties the music ministry was developed, adding ensembles, musicals, and a growing choir. A second worship service was started, and an expansion wing was built on the sanctuary. Group B scored twenty-eight in *worship*.

In the nineties the style of worship was evaluated and changed, adding a contemporary service that blended praise music with traditional hymns. The



blended service was eventually changed to a totally contemporary service, including a praise band. A computerized projection system was added, as well as the development of the use of drama. Northgate offers both a contemporary and a traditional worship service. Group C scored sixty-eight in *worship*.

Fellowship. In the seventies the fellowship of the church was built around church dinners and celebrations. The calendar included the annual birthday celebration of the founding of the church, the annual Sunday school picnic, the annual stewards dinner, as well as class parties. Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, and Sunday evening services were designed for fellowship. Group A scored twenty-four, third highest score of eight, on both *loving relationships* and *holistic small groups*.

Pastor Bates was a program-based leader and the calendar of the eighties reflects a lot of programs. Like the seventies, much of the fellowship was built around church dinners and celebrations. There were all-church events, like the annual Christmas dinner, Sunday family dinners, and the annual birthday dinner. There were also program-specific events, like Christian education staff appreciation desserts or buffets, mother/daughter luncheons, dads and lads breakfasts, and suppers for six. Retreats, camps, and rally events were other means of fellowship. Group B scored twenty-five on *small groups*, and forty-three on *loving relationships*—their highest score.

In the nineties we worked hard to develop small group ministries. We developed a philosophy of ministry and a strategy manual for small groups. Part

of the associate pastor's job description is to recruit and train small group leaders. Home fellowships have replaced the Sunday evening service. Prayer groups, Bible study groups, task groups, and special needs groups have all been incorporated into the small group ministry. Two special needs groups that met with particular success are the Prime Timers--a senior citizens group--and the Promise Keepers--men's ministries. Group C scored forty-five on both *small groups and loving relationships*.

Discipleship. In the seventies Northgate followed a traditional, denominational model for discipleship--Sunday school, Bible studies, youth groups, men's and women's ministries, and Sunday evening services. Two successful programs that were initiated in this era were Junior Church and CYC (Christian Youth Crusaders)--both geared toward children in grades six and under. Group A scored forty-one in *passionate spirituality*.

In the eighties Northgate followed a program model. More age-level and gender specific ministries were started. In addition to having quality children and youth programs, concern grew for quality adult programs. Adult Sunday school electives focused on felt needs--parenting, marriage, stress management, etc. Seminars were offered to meet these needs--financial planning, marriage enrichment, dealing with anger or grief, divorce recovery, etc. Group B scored twenty-two in *passionate spirituality*.

Programs gave way to seven-day-a-week activities and special events in the nineties. Recreational and exercise programs, twelve step groups, home

fellowships, Bible studies, children, youth, young, middle, and senior adult activities are all designed to help people become more like Christ in attitude and action. We are striving to teach people the will and way of God. Group C scored fifty-one in *passionate spirituality*.

Service. The church exists to minister to and serve the needs of people. Every member should be involved in a ministry which they are gifted to perform. In the seventies the structure provided the framework for service—administration, education, and service. Most people served in Christian education programs—Sunday school teacher, CYC helper, Vacation Bible School helper—or on a committee—board of trustees, board of stewards, finance committee, visitation committee, etc. Group A scored thirty-three in *gift-oriented ministry* and twenty-four in *flexible structures* and minus three in *empowering leadership*.

In the eighties Northgate attempted to put everyone in service by involvement on a committee. People served on boards, cabinets, commissions, committees, and offices. We had directors, chairs, coordinators, officers, leaders, and assistants. The intention was to have people take ownership of the ministry through personal involvement. Group B scored forty-two in *gift-oriented ministry* and eleven in *flexible structures* and seven in *empowering leadership*.

In the nineties we began classes on spiritual gifts and offered spiritual gift testing. We re-wrote job descriptions, downsized committees, and streamlined the structure. People are encouraged to find and use their spiritual gift through volunteering five hours of service per week in their area of giftedness. We are

becoming a gift-based, lay led, every member in ministry movement. Group C scored seventy in *gift-oriented ministry* and forty-eight in *flexible structures* and forty-four in *empowering leadership*.

Evangelism. The church exists to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility to share the message of salvation. The primary goal is for the church to focus its efforts on the needs and questions of non-Christians. In the seventies Northgate started a radio ministry to try to reach the unchurched of our area. Group A scored twenty-four for the quality *need-oriented evangelism*.

In the eighties the method of evangelism most used at Northgate was the altar call. Special services, crusades, rallies, and concerts filled the calendar. Pastor Bates was a good counselor and gave much of his time to caring for the needs of persons in crisis. He used the context of counseling to share the gospel or to build bridges to bring persons to a church service where they would hear the gospel. Church planting was explored with the hopes of beginning a new Free Methodist Church in neighboring Leroy, New York. Group B scored twenty-nine in *need-oriented evangelism*.

In the nineties we occasionally give altar calls and have special services, but the primary means of evangelism has been through relationships. Our small groups and Promise Keepers have been effective means of winning the lost. Group C scored forty-eight in *need-oriented evangelism*.

Operational Question #3:

*In what ways did the leadership develop strategic and concrete action plans?*

Goal-setting, strategic planning, concrete action plans, and prioritizing are all part of empowering leadership. *Empowering Leadership* was the lowest score for all three groups: group A, minus three; group B, seven; group C, forty-four. This is not to say that planning did not take place, but that it was not a strength of the church.

In the seventies planning was done primarily by the pastor and by committee. The launch of the radio ministry and the four purposes of the church identified by the pastor's advisory board are examples of some of group A's strategy and plans. In the eighties group B used the commissions and committees for planning and strategy. Leadership retreats were also a means of planning. In the nineties the commissions and the pastor's cabinet have been the planning boards. Leadership retreats have become the means of goal setting and prioritizing.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine whether similarities exist among the organizational structure and the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church, Batavia, New York. Twenty-four key lay leaders were identified for this study. Each was sent a copy of the *Natural Church Development Survey*. The surveys were divided into three groups—eight for the seventies (group A), eighties (group B), and nineties (group C), according to the participants' involvement in church leadership for that time period. One of the original twenty-four (from group B) declined to participate and returned his survey. A replacement was selected and he completed and returned his survey, as did the other twenty-three. All of the participants have been involved in church leadership and are considered as the core committed of the congregation. Some of them have been in leadership for the entire twenty-five years of this study, 1971 - 1996.

A total of eight scores was placed in each group for the eight essential elements of a healthy structure and a "quality index" was identified for each group. Group A scored twenty-three, group B scored twenty-six, and group C scored fifty-two. The difference between group C and groups A and B was significant.

The quality index was compared with the decadal growth rates of worship attendance. Group A was in a decline and experienced a 6.8 percent decrease,

group B experienced 57.5 percent growth, and group C had 12 percent growth. The difference between the growth of groups A and B is significant, yet their quality index is similar. Group C had a smaller growth rate than group B, yet had a substantially higher quality index. The quality index scores for the eight essential elements of a healthy system do not match the growth performance of groups B and C. Given these findings, it seems that organizational structures of a church have little impact upon its growth.

### **Evaluation and Interpretation of the Data**

On the surface it seems the organizational structure has little impact upon the growth of the church. The study showed little difference between the quality index of group B that was growing and group A that was not growing. The quality index of group C was higher than that of group B, but group B had higher growth performance. The failure of the results to show similarities among organizational structures and the growth of the church suggests that structures have little impact on the growth of the church.

Despite these factors, it is premature on the basis of this study to conclude that structures have no impact upon growth. The critical question this study raises is, "How can we grow in the eight essential elements of a healthy organizational structure?" Qualitative growth is more crucial than quantitative growth, and quantitative growth often occurs as a natural by-product of improved quality.

An important question can be raised about the methodology used in this study to determine the organizational structures of the church. The *Natural Church Development Survey* analyzes eight qualitative characteristics of a church system—leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship, small groups, evangelism, and loving relationships. This survey is usually given to groups of twenty to thirty participants. This study used groups of eight. Also two-thirds of those completing the surveys were relying upon distant memories of how things were in the past—from the seventies and eighties. Because of this smaller sampling and the reliance upon memories from the seventies and eighties, the validity and reliability factors would not be as accurate. Perhaps the scores would have been different for groups A and B if the surveys were taken in that time period, and perhaps the scores would be different if a minimum of twenty participants completed a survey for all three groups. The study did provide interesting historical perspective and identified significant movement or trends in the eight quality characteristics:

One of the recurring findings of this study was the importance of involving gifted people in the ministry of the church. This can be seen in the high score of *gift-oriented ministry* for all three groups. This was the high score for group C, which had the highest quality index, and was the second score for group B, which had the highest growth performance. It was also the second highest score for group A. Christian Schwarz discovered in his research that “None of the



eight quality characteristics showed nearly as much influence on both personal and church life as *gift-oriented ministry*." (24)

The concept of gift-oriented ministry is deeply rooted in New Testament theology. The Apostle Paul talks about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Peter mentions gifts in I Peter 4. These scriptures affirm that every believer has been gifted by God for specific involvement in the ministry of the church. The role of church leadership is to help its members discover and develop their gift in an appropriate area of service.

A second recurring finding of this study was that the pastor's role as an empowering leader is not the most crucial component of a church organizational structure. *Empowering leadership* was the weakest characteristic for all three groups. Group A had the lowest quality index and growth performance. Group B had the greatest growth performance, and group C had the highest quality index. Yet, *empowering leadership* was the lowest score for all three groups.

This is not to say that the pastor's leadership role is not important, but that apparently it is not the key factor in the growth or balance of the organizational health of the church. The good news is that pastors do not need to be superstars. He or she does not need to have all the skills but must know how to find, motivate, and utilize gifted persons in the work of the church. The findings seem to support Wagner (1984) and George and Logan's (1987) claim

that effective church structures require a balance between pastoral leadership and lay participation.

Another finding of this study was that the pastor's giftedness, strengths, or passion will dominate the organizational structure of the church. The strength of group A was *passionate spirituality*. Pastor Hessler's gifts were in the area of shepherding and functioning as a chaplain. The strength of group B was *loving relationships*. Pastor Bates was an enabler and consensus leader. The strength of group C was *gift-oriented ministry*. I tend to be a task-leader and delegate the work of the church to those gifted to fulfill the mission. The survey scores support Warren's (1995) assertion that churches are often an extension of their pastor's giftedness.

A fourth finding is that the strengths of a church and its organizational structure change from era to era. The profiles of groups A, B, and C are very different from one another. A church profile reflects only one moment in time. A characteristic that is a weakness in one group shows up as a strength in another group. This may be explained by a strategy to use the resources of stronger qualities to improve areas of weakness.

A fifth finding is that a purpose-driven structure is preferred by the Northgate Free Methodist Church leadership to an authoritarian or bureaucratic structure. The quality index of group A which had an authoritarian structure was twenty-three, group B which had a bureaucratic structure was twenty-six, and group C which had a purpose-driven structure was fifty-two. The

congregational reflection group discussed the survey results and agreed that it accurately reflected the church profile for the past twenty-five years. Apparently they think that the church system is much healthier now than it was in the past. Warren (1995) maintains that a church will be stronger and healthier by being purpose-driven. He believes a church needs to ask two critical questions: "Are we doing what God intends for us to do?" and "How well are we doing it?"

### **Implications for the Existing Body of Knowledge**

The results of this study suggest that no similarities exist among the organizational structure and the growth of the church. At first glance it appears that this finding conflicts with some authors whose writings were examined earlier. For example, Schwarz (1996) asserted that structures have no other legitimation than to allow growth. Warren (1995) stated that structure does not cause growth but it allows growth. However, both Schwarz and Warren saw structure as one of multiple factors that determine the health of the organization and permits growth. Warren says all five purposes—fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism—must be in balance for a church to be healthy. Schwarz maintains that for a church to be healthy and growing, none of the eight essential elements—leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship, small groups, evangelism, and loving relationships—may be missing from the church system. The issue is health versus growth, and balance between multiple, critical components versus one component.

The findings of this study also seem to conflict with the assumption of some authors that the role of the pastor as leader is critical to church growth. Schaller (1983), Wagner (1984), and George and Logan (1987) suggested that the leadership of the pastor is key to the growth of the church. They believe that without the initiating leadership of a strong pastor there would be no net increase in church attendance. The scores on my surveys placed leadership last on the scale. Pastoral leadership is one of the critical factors in church health and growth but not the key factor as seen from the perception of the lay population in this study.

In examining the findings of this study, it appears that ongoing analysis and diagnosis is an essential element for health and growth. This is supported by several authors (Schaller, 1983; Wagner, 1984; George and Logan, 1987; Warren, 1995; Schwarz, 1996). These writers maintain that a healthy church in most cases will be a growing church. If it is not growing, it may be suffering from a health or growth-inhibiting obstacle. An accurate diagnosis is needed to determine the right course of action to remove the obstacle(s). Diagnosis and analysis help determine what the key factors are at this moment for the development of the church. This supports the findings of this study that a church profile is for one moment in time. Churches are constantly changing. It is important, therefore, to observe changes over longer periods of time. Development must be pursued, implemented, and monitored.

## Contributions to Research Methodology

This study demonstrates results in the area of data collection for the *Natural Church Development Survey*. A return rate of 96 percent--twenty-four out of twenty-five-- is an outstanding rate for mailed questionnaires. Three elements of the data collection process may account for the successful return rate. First is the selection process of the participants. Four long-term members were asked to fill out an inventory identifying twenty-four key leaders. The four were selected on the basis of being active members over the past twenty years or more. They were instructed by means of a cover letter how to identify a leader, and were provided with a three-column inventory with twenty-four blanks to create their lists. This use of active, long-term members and concise instructions and forms resulted in a good response and a good selection of participants. The long-term members knew best who had made up the committed core. Secondly, each participant received a cover letter and a stamped return envelope. The cover letter explained the nature of the project, the reason for their involvement, and a date for completing and returning the survey. Thirdly, the success rate was enhanced by a follow-up contact to those who did not return the survey by the requested date. After one week of the date, each person who had not returned the survey received an e-mail or phone call. Each of them completed and returned the survey within three days of this contact.

## Relationship To Previous Studies

This study made use of the *Natural Church Development Survey*.

Christian Schwarz developed and used this instrument to study more than one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on all five continents. His was the most comprehensive research project ever conducted on the causes of church growth. Originating in Germany, this research method and survey instrument are being translated and published in English by ChurchSmart Resources. The book came out in May of 1996 and the survey instrument in February of 1998. David Wetzler, General Manager of ChurchSmart Resources, provided me with a pre-publication copy of the survey instrument for use in this research.

Schwarz discovered eight quality characteristics that lead to health and growth. No one single factor is key, nor can any one of the eight qualities be missing. On the average, growing churches have measurably higher quality. From his study he concluded every church has a minimum factor that represents an area of need in the balance of health. By utilizing its strengths to invest efforts into raising quality in a low area, a church has greater potential to increase qualitative health and quantitative growth. Schwarz's study observed a correlation between health and growth—churches that scored sixty-five or higher in each of the eight qualities were growing churches. While my study did not show similarities among the organizational structure and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church, it did show areas needing attention to strengthen the growth potential of the church.

This study also made use of the systems theory research of Armour and Browning. Armour and Browning contend that multi-system management is needed in the organizational life of the church. They identify eight systems of dominant thinking, moving from simpler to more ambiguous ways of looking at the world and the realities of life. Each of these eight systems can be found within the church, with the dominant system providing guidance to our outlook, priorities, and behavior. In the face of these diverse systems, the leadership of the church needs to deal with constant confusion, conflict, complexity, and change. Armour and Browning write:

In essence, we must tailor-make every structural element in a multi-system church. Doing so requires immense leadership energy, far beyond what traditional church organization demands. Not only that, multi-system management puts a premium on planning carefully, gathering feedback continuously, and making frequent midcourse corrections. You cannot put a multi-system church on autopilot and expect it to fly straight and level very long. (205)

Armour and Browning suggest that there are four essentials in multi-system church management. The first is developing a congregation-wide atmosphere of forbearance. Second is maintaining feedback loops in decision-making; third, practicing systems-sensitivity without using systems terminology; fourth, becoming diligent in vision-casting (206). My study affirms that a systems approach is a preferred approach to organizing and leading the ministries of the church. Systemic thinking assumes there are many contributing factors to any set of circumstances.

Rick Warren's writing on becoming a purpose-driven church was also a foundational work utilized for this study. Rick Warren (1995) says, "Church growth is the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is *biblical* and our mission is *balanced*. Each of the five New Testament purposes of the church must be in equilibrium with the others for health to occur" (49). Warren defines the five purposes of the church as fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism.

My study highlights that churches as organizations need to pay careful attention to the development of appropriate structures and systems around which they organize their ministries and programs. Rick Warren contends that

While the kind of structure a church has does not *cause* growth, it does control the *rate* of growth. And every church must eventually decide whether it is going to be structured for *control* or structured for *growth*.(378)

To be *purpose-driven* means that the church has defined its purposes and then figured out a process or system for fulfilling those purposes (Warren 109).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The scope of the findings of this study are limited in that it is a single, descriptive case study of Northgate Free Methodist Church in Batavia, New York. Every church is unique and much of what is described here relates to the culture, context, personality, spirituality, and policy of Northgate. To generalize the results of this study to other churches would be inappropriate.



Another factor limiting the results of this study was the methodology. I used the *Natural Church Development Survey* usually given to from twenty to thirty key leaders. My study covered twenty-five years of history from 1971 - 1996. Since it would be difficult, if not impossible, to identify twenty or thirty leaders from the seventies and eighties, I selected twenty-four participants total and divided them into three groups of eight—eight each for the seventies, eighties, and nineties. Those persons from the seventies and eighties also had to rely on distant memories to answer the questions that represented the ministry of the church for the time period selected. Their scores may have been different if the surveys were taken in each decade and by larger groups of participants.

This study is limited by the subjective bias of the present pastor serving as the researcher.

### **Unexpected Findings and Conclusions**

One of the unexpected findings of this study was the significant difference in the quality index score for group C. Group A scored twenty-three; group B, twenty-six; and group C, fifty-two. Group B had a much higher growth performance than group C—57.5 percent versus 12 percent—yet group C had the higher quality index. This leads to the conclusion that the organizational structure had little impact upon the growth performance in this study.

It was likewise surprising to find the quality index was so similar for groups A and B—twenty-three and twenty-six. Group A experienced virtually no growth, while group B grew from 134 to 211. Given the fact that the quality index

was so similar, it follows that little if any similarity exists among organizational structures and church growth.

It was surprising that the leaders of the nineties feel the church is so much healthier now than in the seventies or eighties. Often my role as the change agent has brought about resistance. Perhaps the higher quality index score says that the people do not always appreciate the process of change but they like the end result.

### **Applications and Future Studies**

The findings of this study could be useful in developing and implementing strategic plans for increasing the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church. The eight scores are a dependable basis for future plans and action steps. The decisive question is: "How well are we doing in--name the area?" We are doing well in *gift-oriented ministry*, but are weak in *empowering leadership, loving relationships, and holistic small groups*.

The growth of the church is hindered by the quality characteristics that are least developed. Our resources should be focused on yielding the greatest long-range return on our investment. By applying our strength--*gift-oriented ministry*--to one or more of the weak areas we could strengthen our ministry to experience new qualitative and quantitative growth. This study provides Northgate Free Methodist Church an analysis of the critical factors needing attention, identifying its strengths and weaknesses in the eight essential elements for a healthy, growing church. The findings are based upon empirical

evidence that a correlation exists between growth and the eight quality characteristics.

Northgate should do another profile in six to twelve months to see how their minimum factors have developed over time. Minimum factors are those quality characteristics which are least developed and which most block the growth of the church. Churches are constantly changing. New people join. Others leave. Workers and leaders lend their influence for a time. Spiritual movements come and go. Society changes. A second profile could identify some of these changes, evaluate progress on work done to improve their minimum factor, and open discussion for steps needed to implement new strategies and action plans. Ministry development could be monitored by conducting a new church profile survey, comparing the results with the profile for this study.

If I were to repeat this study I would change two procedures that might enhance the findings. First, I would limit the study to the eighties and nineties. The seventies are distant and it was difficult for survey participants from that era to answer the questions with accurate recall. Many of the participants from the eighties are still involved in leadership and still have vivid memories of the past decade. Secondly, I would select a larger population for testing. The survey should have been given to twenty-four participants for each group. These factors would have provided more reliable and accurate data for the church profile.

While this study focused upon the relationship between the organizational structure and the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church of Batavia, New York, from 1971 - 1996, future studies could focus on another time period. A church profile only reflects one moment in time. Another study could also identify and interview different key leaders, which would give another perspective. A comparative study could be done with another church of similar size and makeup to see if there is a correlation between factors identified as impacting the health and growth of a congregation.

While this study failed to identify similarities among organizational structure and the growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church, it does not nullify that a balanced, qualitative ministry system is crucial to quantitative church growth. Another researcher could do a more in-depth study of the various dimensions of the organizational structure and their impact upon the growth of the church. Future studies could provide insight into what constitutes a qualitative organizational structure and its impact upon quantitative church growth. A more objective researcher—one outside of the system with no vested interests—may have different findings.

### **Theological Reflection**

Does God care about church structures? I believe he does. The theological nature of congregational structures is supported by Scripture. Although the Bible does not define a specific structure or system for church organization, examples abound of good administration and organizational

principles in both the Old and New Testaments. Moses organized the leaders of Israel, Joseph administered the affairs of Egypt, Nehemiah cast a vision and led the people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, Jesus trained the twelve to do the work of ministry, the Apostle Paul established congregations everywhere he traveled.

One of the primary biblical images used in the New Testament is the body. The Apostle Paul uses the human body as a model of church organization. In I Corinthians 12 he talks about how body parts must work together in order for the whole body to be healthy and functional. Just as the body is a living organism and is made up of many systems, so is the church. Each member of the body is gifted to perform a specific function. The concept of gift-oriented ministry is deeply rooted in New Testament theology. The Apostle Paul talks about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Peter mentions gifts in I Peter 4. These scriptures affirm that every believer has been gifted by God for specific involvement in the ministry of the church. The role of church leadership is to help its members discover and develop their gifts in an appropriate area of service.

Another biblical image the Apostle Paul uses is a helmsman. Paul identifies administration as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 he uses the word *kuberneseis* for administration. This word is translated as leading, governing, ruling, organizing, administering. The same Greek word is used for *helmsman*. The picture of administration is that of a pilot

steering a ship. The pilot does not work alone to steer the ship but directs the crew to accomplish the task of moving from port to port. Good church administration facilitates the work of every gifted member to accomplish the mission.

Another biblical concept that relates to structures and the need for them to change is the concept of "wineskins". In Luke 5:36 - 39 Jesus speaks in a parable about new cloth and new wine not adapting to old cloth and old wineskins. Howard Snyder says,

There is that which is new and potent and essential--the gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is that which is secondary, subsidiary, man-made. These are the wineskins, and include traditions, structures and patterns of doing things which have grown up around the gospel. (13)

Snyder goes on to say that church structures are relative and they need to be changed repeatedly and updated.

When it comes to church structures it seems there are three approaches. One approach is the spiritual view. Structures are seen as unnecessary or even as being evil. All we need is the Holy Spirit. Through prayer and discernment we can understand God's leading to do his work his way. Another approach is the technical view. Structures are seen as being all important. All we need to do is identify the right method, model, or form. If we can build the right organization, systems, and structures, we can produce the model church. A third approach is the systems view. Instead of viewing individual parts or concentrating on isolated issues of the church or its ministry, one must view the interrelatedness of all dynamics. This study has attempted to take a systems

approach, assessing the qualitative and quantitative dynamics of the structures of Northgate Free Methodist Church.

To theologize about church structures is to think seriously about our worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry. It is good to assess the "health quotients" of our leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship, small groups, evangelism, and relationships. No single factor leads to health and growth. The key is in the harmonious interplay of all eight essential elements. This study attempts to be careful to not suggest that by employing these eight factors the church of Jesus Christ can be produced. Rather, when the church structure contains a balance of these elements it will likely be a healthy, growing church.

Does God care about church systems and structures? I believe he does. Scripture is filled with examples of good administration and organizational principles. If God is interested in church systems and structures, we should be too. Churches work the way they do because of how the people in them think and interact. Both our organizational structures and our conceptual constructs need to harmonize with our purpose and mission. Church organizations depend upon systems and structures for their health and effectiveness. By putting God's principles to work in the church, the end result may be church health and growth.

## A Personal Note

In a recent monthly newsletter I wrote, “Our *vision* is to become a community where God is seen, love is felt, and lives are changed. Our *mission* is to bring people to Jesus Christ and to build them up in that relationship. Our *goals* are to reach out and win others to Jesus Christ; to move people toward community; to stimulate growth toward Christian maturity; and to involve persons in full participation in our vision, mission, and goals.” I want to communicate that Northgate is transitioning toward becoming a purpose-driven church.

This study was inconclusive in proving that church structures help or hinder growth. On the other hand, the study highlights empirical evidence that a purpose-driven church, having a balance of all eight essential elements, may experience qualitative health and quantitative growth. I am encouraged by the developing trends at Northgate Free Methodist Church in Batavia, New York. We are moving in the right direction—toward health and growth. The church leadership is ready to apply the findings of this study to strengthen the ministry of the church.



## **Appendix**

# Questionnaire for Lay People

This questionnaire will help us discover the strengths and weaknesses in our church. It is important that you answer *all* of the questions by filling in the blanks or by marking one of the indicated boxes. When you come to a question in which none of the responses match your opinion, please choose the response that corresponds *as closely as possible* to your opinion. Think about our church and how it looks from your point of view at present.

The questionnaires are evaluated anonymously by ChurchSmart. Your answers will be treated absolutely confidentially. Do not write your name on the questionnaire. Please return the completed questionnaire to the person from whom you received it. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

1. How much time do you spend per week (excluding church meetings) with friends from church?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Less than 1 hour    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 to 2 hours    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 2 to 3 hours    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 3 to 5 hours    ☐ <sub>4</sub> More than 5 hours
2. How often have you been invited by church members (not relatives) for dinner or coffee during the past two months?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Not at all    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 time    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 2 to 3 times    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 4 to 5 times    ☐ <sub>4</sub> More than 5 times
3. How often have you invited church members (not relatives) for dinner or coffee during the past two months?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Not at all    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 time    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 2 to 3 times    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 4 to 5 times    ☐ <sub>4</sub> More than 5 times
4. Approximately what percentage of your gross income do you give in tithes and offerings for church support, missions, etc.?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Less than 1%    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1-4%    ☐ <sub>2</sub> About 5%  
☐ <sub>3</sub> 6-9%    ☐ <sub>4</sub> 10%    ☐ <sub>5</sub> More than 10%
5. How many friendships do you have with other church members?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> None    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 to 2    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 3 to 5    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 6 to 10  
☐ <sub>4</sub> 11 to 20    ☐ <sub>5</sub> 21 to 30    ☐ <sub>6</sub> More than 30
6. Have you ever been a member of another church since you became a Christian?    ☐ <sub>0</sub> Yes    ☐ <sub>1</sub> No
7. How long have you been a Christian?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Less than 1 year    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 to 2 years    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 3 to 5 years    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 6 to 10 years  
☐ <sub>4</sub> 11 to 20 years    ☐ <sub>5</sub> 21 to 30 years    ☐ <sub>6</sub> More than 30 years    ☐ <sub>7</sub> No indication possible
8. How many friendships do you have with non-Christians?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> None    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 1 to 2    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 3 to 5    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 6 to 10  
☐ <sub>4</sub> 11 to 20    ☐ <sub>5</sub> 21 to 30    ☐ <sub>6</sub> More than 30
9. Has your church publicly announced a goal for the number of congregational members you would like to have by a given date?    ☐ <sub>0</sub> Yes    ☐ <sub>1</sub> No
10. Approximately how much time do you spend in prayer each day?  
☐ <sub>0</sub> Less than 10 minutes    ☐ <sub>1</sub> 10 to 20 minutes    ☐ <sub>2</sub> 21 to 30 minutes    ☐ <sub>3</sub> 31 to 45 minutes  
☐ <sub>4</sub> 46 to 60 minutes    ☐ <sub>5</sub> 61 to 90 minutes    ☐ <sub>6</sub> 91 to 120 minutes    ☐ <sub>7</sub> More than 120 minutes

<b>To what degree is the following statement true? . . .</b> <i>(For each question, check one answer only.)</i>	Very great extent	Great extent	Average	Hardly	Not at all	
	0	1	2	3	4	
The leaders of our church (pastor, elders, etc.) have an inspiring optimism.						11
I know my spiritual gifts.						12
I know that other church members pray for me regularly.						13
I am fully informed about our church plan for church growth.						14
Attending the worship service is an inspiring experience for me.						15
I am a member of a group in my church where it is possible to talk about personal problems.						16
I know that programs exist in our church which are particularly applicable to non-Christians.						17
I find it easy to tell other Christians about my feelings.						18
The only thing we can do for revival is pray.						19
Our church service appeals primarily to non-Christians.						20
I would call myself a happy and contented person.						21
The leaders of our church prefer to do the work themselves rather than delegate it.						22
I enjoy the tasks I do in the church fellowship.						23
I enjoy reading the Bible on my own.						24
I know which goals our church will pursue in the coming years.						25
I enjoy listening to the sermons in the worship service.						26
I am a member of a group in my church in which others will pray with me and for me if needed.						27
New Christians find friends in our church quickly.						28
In our church it is possible to talk with other people about feelings and problems.						29
I enjoy my life (profession, family, spare time, etc.).						30
I consider it to be dangerous to plan and organize spiritual things.						31
The leaders of our church concentrate on the tasks for which they are gifted.						32
I feel that my church supports me in my ministry.						33
I experience the transforming influences faith has in the different areas of my life (i.e. profession, family, spare time, etc.).						34
It is my impression that the structure of our church hinders church life rather than promotes it.						35
I feel that the church service has a positive influence on me.						36
I am a member of a group in our church in which we talk about spiritual issues.						37
It is my impression that the evangelistic activities in our church lack imagination.						38

<p><b>To what degree is the following statement true? ...</b>  <i>(For each question, check one answer only.)</i></p>	<p>Very great extent</p>	<p>Great extent</p>	<p>Average</p>	<p>Hardly</p>	<p>Not at all</p>	
	0	1	2	3	4	
There is a lot of joy and laughter in our church.						39
I have many reasons to be happy.						40
Our pastor looks for help from lay people to complement those areas in which he is not gifted.						41
It is my experience that God obviously uses my work for building the church.						42
I am enthusiastic about my church.						43
The activities of our church are characterized by successful planning and organization.						44
I feel that the sermon in the worship service speaks to my life needs.						45
I am a member of a small group in which I feel at home.						46
When new people come to church events, we approach them openly and lovingly.						47
The atmosphere of our church is strongly influenced by praise and compliments.						48
The leaders of our church prefer to evade conflicts.						49
The tasks I perform in my church are in accordance with my gifts.						50
The Word of God is the most important authority in the decisions of my everyday life.						51
In our church we often try new things.						52
In my small group we spend lots of time with things which are irrelevant to me.						53
In our church the subject of evangelism is discussed at all possible opportunities.						54
When someone in our church does a good job, I tell them.						55
Our pastor has too much work to do.						56
I feel my task in the church is a great challenge.						57
Our pastor is a spiritual example to me.						58
Very often, I have reason to thank God for His work in my life.						59
I could write down the organizational structure in my church.						60
The music in the church services helps me worship God.						61
Optimal care is given to our children during church services.						62
In my small group we show trust towards one another.						63
I enjoy bringing my friends, colleagues, or relatives (who do not yet know Jesus) to church.						64
When someone in our church has a different opinion from me, I prefer to be silent rather than to endanger peace.						65
Our pastor gives a lot of church members the opportunity to help in organizing the church service.						66
I know what value my work has in the total work of the church.						67

To what degree is the following statement true? ... (For each question, check one answer only.)	Very great extent	Great extent	Average	Hardly	Not at all	
	0	1	2	3	4	
I firmly believe that God will act even more powerfully in our church in the coming years.						68
The lay people of our church are trained frequently.						69
I'm often bored in the worship service.						70
I can be as active as I like in my small group.						71
I pray for my friends, colleagues and relatives who do not yet know Jesus Christ, that they will come to faith.						72
I attentively observe world events through the media.						73
Our pastor seems to feel at home in our church.						74
I often tell other Christians when I have experienced something from God.						75
I consider our church to be traditional.						76
In my opinion, Christians should engage themselves in politics.						77
In our church there is a leader for each ministry.						78
My most important motive for attending the church service is a sense of duty.						79
In the groups I belong to it is easy for newcomers to be integrated.						80
It is hard for me to sum up in a few phrases what faith means for me.						81
Our church does something about hunger in the world.						82
People in our church are highly motivated to do church work.						83
Times of prayer are an inspiring experience for me.						84
When a church member is obviously in the wrong, (moral misconduct, willful disobedience, etc.) this is corrected with love, but firmly.						85
A Christian should not be engaged in politics.						86
I enjoy bringing visitors to our church services.						87
It is the declared goal of our small groups to reproduce themselves by cell division.						88
It is not possible to be a devoted servant of God and simultaneously enjoy life.						89
In our worship services new faces are a rarity.						90
I try to deepen my relationships with people who do not yet know Jesus Christ.						91

Dear

I am conducting a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. I request your assistance in this project which involves filling out a brief inventory, identifying twenty-four past and present lay leaders. You are one of four people selected because of your long-term participation in the life and ministry of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past twenty to thirty years.

Please complete and return the inventory as soon as possible. There are three lists of eight: one for the '70s, '80s and '90s. Try to identify eight persons for each decade who served in a leadership role, preferably in a formal leadership role on the Pastor's Cabinet.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Mitch Pierce

**Figure #2**

Please identify eight(8) leaders for each decade--someone who served on the Pastor's Cabinet.

**'70s**

**'80s**

**'90s**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear

I am conducting a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. I request your assistance in this project which involves filling out a brief inventory which will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

In this project I am studying the correlation between the organizational structure and the health and growth of Northgate Free Methodist Church over the past 20 years. The organizational structure of the church will be evaluated by the balance of the Eight Essential Elements of empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. The decadal growth charts of the 70s, 80s, and 90s will be used to compare the relationship between the growth rate and the "health quotient" from the Eight Essential Elements.

The key lay leaders who were asked to participate in this study would be considered to be the core committed leaders and persons most involved in the center of the life of Northgate Free Church, during a given decade. You are one of eight people identified as a key lay leader of the 70s, 80s, 90s.

When you take the inventory, attempt to answer the questions as would have been representative of the church's ministry for that time period selected. Relate the situations mentioned in the inventory to our church for that decade. Please complete and return the survey to me by October 20th.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Mitch Pierce



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